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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
WILLA CATHER: THE SEARCH FOR
ORDER IN HER MAJOR FICTION.

by



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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS: "Willa Cather: The Search for Order in Her Major Fiction".

The thesis will consider the major novels of Willa Cather as an expression of her search for order through Nature, Art and Religion. It will be divided into three sections to correspond with these orders, each section examining the novels of its area with reference to theme, point of view, structure, characterization, metaphorical pattern and ethical content. Although each novel belongs primarily to one of these three divisions, it will also be examined for its contribution to the other two; thus each chapter also is subdivided into three: Man and Nature, Man and Art, Man and Religion.


The introduction to the thesis will approach Cather's search for order in art, prepare for the examination of the three centres of order, place Cather in the stream of American literature, and examine her contribution to it and her essential strengths and weaknesses as an artist. In addition, an introduction to each section will consider such problems as Cather's theory of Nature, Art or Religion, her approach to these in the novels as a whole, the traditions from which she draws, the handling of the hero, and the use of each as a form of escape from the problems of the modern world.

On the whole, the novels will be approached chronologically. Part I, The Order of Nature, considers Cather's rediscovery of Nature and her examination of the meaning of life in terms of the land; O Pioneers!, My Antonia, and the late "Neighbour Rosicky" reveal Cather's belief in nature as a form of salvation for modern man. Part II, The Order of Art, will incorporate Cather's early treatment of the artist in the Jamesian Alexander's Bridge and The Song of the Lark with the novels of her middle phase, One of Ours, A Lost Lady, and The Professor's House. The first two deal with the accomplished artist; the last three consider the failure of art as a way of life in modern America. Part III, The Order of Religion, will examine My Mortal Enemy, Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, as expressions of Cather's search for order, stability and changelessness in religion, a search which takes her away from the modern world and into the past of New Mexico and Quebec which can be controlled and directed by the artist as she wills. Yet this search will be seen to be actually a wider treatment of aestheticism for the value of religion is its ritual, its expression of beauty through art and handicraft, and its transfer to America of the European "comely life". In summary, it will be seen that each of these stages examines the quest of the artist for order through Nature, Art and Religion.

Cather's final two novels Lucy Gayheart and Sapphira and the Slave-Girl will not be considered in detail in the thesis. The first of these relates to the Order of Art but is a lesser treatment of

themes already presented more effectively earlier and therefore an anticlimax, which weakens Cather's whole statement of art. Sapphira and the Slave-Girl is a very interesting novel but not relevant to this study. Although here again Cather turns to the American past and its early cultural heritage for values not found in the modern world, its central importance is not its relation to nature, art or religion, but its examination of human relationships and ethical problems pertaining to slavery; in the end, these problems too are evaded by Cather through her changing attitudes to Sapphira herself and her submergence of Rachel, Sapphira's daughter and opponent, to a secondary position in the novel. It is felt that this material requires a different approach from that adopted in this thesis and it is therefore omitted.

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PREFACE

Upon completion of this thesis, I realize that the topic I have chosen in effect involves three different considerations and this accounts for the length of the work. Nevertheless, I am not sorry to have included all three aspects, for I feel that each alone is insufficient to explain the impact and significance of the works considered. Of the books on Cather in print, four are primarily biographies, one a monograph and another a brief survey; only John Randall III deals at length with all major aspects of the novels, and while I agree with him at many points, my treatment of these central themes is somewhat different from his. In addition, there are nine recent theses on Cather which have been examined and acknowledged in the bibliography and footnotes.

At first glance, the organization of the thesis may seem complex, in particular the subdivision of each long chapter into three sections to correspond with three parts of the thesis. While this necessitates certain repetition in the introductions and the individual chapters, it also has the advantage of treating each novel as a unit and indicating the balance of the three orders, nature, art and religion, observing the predominance in turn of each and the subordination of the other two. Moreover, since certain passages illustrate characteristics of two or more orders, a simple division into three sections would not avoid this repetition and would necessitate further explanations, as each novel then would be treated at three different points in the thesis. Thus this organization was chosen to provide a full and satisfactory treatment

of each area.

I would like to thank the Department at Edmonton and, in particular, Dr. Kreisel, for their attention and help during my graduate studies, and my supervisor, Dr. E. G. Griffin, for his unfailing encouragement, constructive suggestions and patience throughout the growth of this thesis.

Calgary, Alberta, October, 1969

INTRODUCTION: WILLA CATHER'S WORLD.

"We approach the world through art and art is our link with it". In her Willa Cather: A Memoir Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant observes that Willa Cather comes closer to living out this dictum of Goethe's than any other writer she has known.¹ Thus a study of Willa Cather's art involves a study as well of the world as she saw and recorded it through fiction, and her search for order and meaning, for stability and eternal values in the midst of the flux and change of life itself. For through her art Cather is able, at least temporarily, to bring shape and order to her experience, to record her impressions of life before her materials dissolve and fade. Like Shakespeare and Keats, she sought the eternal in the temporal, to record "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see"² the emotions and passions of men in a form which is more permanent than the "breathing human passion. . . / That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloyed, / A burning forehead and a parching tongue".³ To Ray Kennedy of The Song of the Lark who struggles to write "First Impressions on Viewing the Grand Canyon": "The art of forging metals was nothing to this treacherous business of recording impressions, in which the material you were so full of vanished mysteriously under your striving hand".⁴ And this idea Cather later expresses more succinctly in her treatise on literary theory "The Novel D  meubl  ": "The higher processes of art are all processes of simplification"; "out of the teaming gleaming stream of the present it [the novel] must select the eternal material of art".⁵

The belief that the artist like God approaches the material of the universe to create order of disorder is basic to the Romantic tradition which Cather accepted in literature. Mark Schorer expresses this in modern terms:

The creative process is the process whereby order is brought out of disorder, from out of chaos. . . . As God brought the universe out of chaos and ancient night, so the artist brings his creative work out of the chaos of his subjective life and out of the disorder of the world. . . . The created object, every truly creative act, transcends in one degree or another both forms of order, the order of the world and the potential order within the subjective life, is new, goes beyond what has been.⁶

Expressing a similar concept in differing metaphor, James compares life to a garden where art plucks its material: "Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed that ingredient".⁷ "The province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision";⁸ life is all "inclusion and confusion"; art is "all discrimination and selection".⁹ Yet the selection is determined by the personality of the author for we all look out from many different windows and all see differently.¹⁰ Thus the work of art cannot be separated essentially from the artist for the two are interdependent: "Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has been conscious".¹¹

This process works in two directions. While the artist reveals something of himself, his world, in the work, the work comes to determine what he himself is so that through art, as Collingwood affirms, he "comes to know himself, to know his own emotion":¹²

His world is his language. What it says to him it says about himself, his imaginative vision of it is his self-knowledge. . . . [Art] is also a making of oneself and one's world, the self which was psyche being remade in the shape of the consciousness, and the world, which was crude sensa, being remade in the shape of language or sensa converted into imagery and charged with

emotional significance.¹³

But while order is essential to art, the search for order involves also the search for the controllable, for the meaningful in a universe which may seem capricious or even totally pointless. As Mumford observes in Art and Technics:

Order of any kind gives man a sense of security: it is the change-ful, the unexpected, the capricious, in other words the unpredictable and uncontrollable, that fill him with anxiety and dread. Hence whenever man becomes unsure of himself, or whenever his creative powers seem inadequate, whenever his symbolisms breed confusion and conflict, his tendency is either to find a refuge in blind Fate, or to concentrate upon those processes in which his own subjective interests are not directly involved.¹⁴

These processes are art, whether technics or creation, and art thus satisfies the need of the artist for order and power, for imposing form upon a life which seems formless and purposeless.

Cather's search for order in the universe becomes a determining factor in her art and in her choice of theme and setting.¹⁵ While the early fiction and Alexander's Bridge were largely imitative, their order imposed from outside, in O Pioneers! and My Ántonia Cather recognized that she had come into her inheritance. She attempted to explain this in the Preface to Alexander's Bridge by reference to intuition as opposed to intellect, an intuition which not only chooses the essential material but shapes it:

When a writer once begins to work with his own material, he realizes that. . . he has been working with it from the beginning--by living it. With this material he is another writer. He has less and less power of choice about the moulding of it. It seems to be there of itself, already moulded. . . . He need have little to do with literary devices; he comes to depend more and more on something else--the thing by which our feet find the road home on a dark night.¹⁶

To some extent this extraordinary perceptivity can be explained by Cather's turning away from material which is hers only by acquisition and towards material from her own experience and emotional inheritance; nevertheless, this does not really apply to the novels after My Ántonia. In truth, Cather had suddenly found in the nature of her homeland something for which she had been unconsciously searching: a centre of order which satisfied a faith essentially religious and provided, at least temporarily, a meaning for life. In Shadows on the Rock she expresses this sense of nature as order in conjunction with religious faith: "And in this safe, lovingly arranged and ordered universe (not too vast, though nobly spacious) in this congenial universe, the drama of man went on at Quebec".¹⁷

The early novels find this religious fulfillment in nature alone, in the land itself, and the seasonal patterns which determine man's existence on the American Mid-Western frontier. Like Cather herself, the secondary Carl Lindstrum of O Pioneers! and the narrator Jim Burden of My Ántonia turn away from the city which they have sought for its culture and art, and back to the land and the women who symbolize it, in order to find themselves, to come to terms with their own experience and with life itself. Jim's recognition of "coming home to myself"¹⁸ thus recapitulates not only the experience of Carl and Jim but of Cather herself and the new generations of men born on the frontier and searching to find themselves in the modern urban centres after its closing. In this sense, Cather is epic for she records a phase of American life which was passing even as she experienced it, and recreates in the reader both the sense of how it

felt to live in those times and of the gentle nostalgia which we feel in contemplating our own lost youth and the youth of our country.¹⁹ Although this gentle nostalgia pervades the end of My Antonia and submerges the realistic detail of the early parts into a golden haze of retrospection, her account is on the whole true and valid, given her angle of vision. It is not until her later years, when she returns to the order of nature in "Neighbour Rosicky," that she loses contact with reality and creates a myth, in which death is negated for continued life in nature, and the harsh details of country life deliberately distorted for the sake of her thesis, that life in the country is enduring, safe, secure and fruitful and that man can fulfill himself only through the soil.

Meanwhile, Cather has exhausted her vein of reminiscence in this line; My Antonia has been successfully concluded but while Jim has found himself, the end of his quest in Antonia, Cather has not. For unlike Jim, and even Carl, she is a true artist, and no order which rejects culture and art can satisfy her for long. While she would rush home from the East to see her family, and Nebraska, once there she became possessed by the "fear of dying in a cornfield".²⁰ Her middle fiction thus turns for meaning to the order of art which she has already approached in the early short stories, Alexander's Bridge and The Song of the Lark. Although Thea Kronberg is the only character who finds in art the sense of fulfillment that Jim finds in nature, a discovery which costs her not less than everything, Cather's other protagonists--Alexander Bartley, Claude Wheeler, Neil Herbert, Professor St. Peter--look to art for their ideals, even

their raison d'être, and their tragedy lies in their recognition that art is no longer possible in America, that the temporal values of post-war America negate the existence of culture and prevent their achieving their quest. Perhaps Cather subconsciously realized that the real failure lay not in society nor in the twentieth century but in her concept of art. In "148 Charles Street" she mourns its loss in the replacement of the salon by the garage,²¹ the old authors by the recent ~~writers~~ so that even Lawrence has become outdated, for the salon of Mrs. Fields has nourished art by shutting out "the noisy push of the present", even "the ugliness of the world, all possibilities of wrenches and jars and wounding contacts" to cherish the delicate flower of culture.²¹ Yet she admits that Mrs. Fields whom she admires so greatly had lived very much in the world of the present: "At eighty she could still entertain new people, new ideas, new forms of art".²² Perhaps an art which must be cherished and sheltered in a hot-house atmosphere by one who can "dispose of anything that threatens it--not only the slug, but even the cold draught that ruffles its petals"²³ is an art which is not hardy enough to survive in the twentieth century. Certain artists thrive on contradiction and conflict, but for Cather these were fatal, and she records the death of her search for order in art in The Professor's House.

Yet her quest is not yet complete for she has not yet "come home to herself".²⁴ And in her late novels My Mortal Enemy, Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she attempts to grasp the certitude and faith of religion as it is expressed through the Catholic Church. As Myra Henshawe remarks, when her life of art

and culture is destroyed:

'Religion is different from everything else; because in religion seeking is finding' She seemed to say that in other searchings it might be the object of the quest that brought satisfaction, or it might be something incidental that one got on the way; but in religion, desire was fulfillment, it was the seeking itself that rewarded.²⁵

Jim Burden found the end of his quest in the object itself, in nature; Thea Kronberg found herself in art, not in an object but in her sense of accomplishment, the feeling which art aroused in her and which she was able to convey to man. Now Cather attempts to find order in seeking, in the lives of a ruined artist, of two priests in New Mexico and of a little French girl in the early Catholic Quebec.²⁶ And here again, she is unable to find the satisfaction and fulfillment she sought, as she recognized when she received correspondence from many priests and laymen after the publication of Death Comes for the Archbishop. The order of religion is not the answer to life, and she returns once more to the art which gives, at least temporarily a meaning to the hours and the days:

No faith, she feared, could save one from the great spiritual duality of our time--the conflict between the brave ideals of our pioneer ancestors, and the mounting materialism and industrialism of the post-war world. The creative writer, we were agreed, has a momentary refuge from the duality that pulls modern man or woman apart but it lasts only for the absorbed duration of the work in which he is engaged. Then comes the dismal moment when the book goes to press--one has produced a dead thing, it seems. How does one deal with the soul, lamenting and tortured? The book will not give the answer.²⁷

Perhaps Cather's final two novels are an attempt to evade this answer, to find "a momentary refuge" from the duality of life. Lucy Gayheart deals again with the life of the artist, but Lucy is

not a great musician like Thea. She sacrifices her art to lament her lost love and the book ends in shallow sentimentality with the premature drowning of Lucy and the life-long sorrow of her boyfriend.²⁸

Sapphira and the Slave Girl begins afresh with a new direction, a new setting and theme: the moral problem of slavery in the South. But while it promises much, and might have indicated a new emergence of another side of Cather, it was written under immense physical difficulties. Its ending is ambiguous and lacks control; it is not clear whether Cather ultimately agrees with Sapphira or with the daughter Rachel who secures the escape of the little yellow girl Sapphira seeks to destroy, and we are left, not with a balance of forces and wills, but with an ambivalence between one position and the other.²⁹ The late stories of The Old Beauty published after Cather's death, are weak and querulous. Cather had, as Sergeant prophesied, outlived her art and sought her final escape in death.

Yet while these three groups of novels seek for fulfillment through nature, art and religion, all three are, in a sense, the quest of the artist for the ideals which David Daiches describes as "beauty, order and heroic action".³⁰ For each protagonist is in a sense Cather herself, an author-surrogate. As Schorer explains, the artist is at the centre of the creative process which attempts to bring order to the chaos of life, to bring the unconscious and subjective into the realm of the conscious or objective³¹, a theory which is a development of Wordsworth's in the Preface to the Excursion "the poet himself constitutes the principle of unity".³¹ In James' phrase, the artist is the man on whom "nothing is lost"³²; Schorer observes

that he brings together the worlds of the external and the internal, the subjective-primitive and the objective-civilized. He resembles the child, in that he lives on two different levels, the world of the imagination and feeling, and the world of social reality, and his genius lies in amalgamating these to recreate for his audience the basic human experience in terms of civilization.³³ This association of the child and the artist has considerable importance for Cather's fiction, as it has for Wordsworth or Dickens, and Cather's choice of an adolescent protagonist or narrator is integral to her artistic vision. In The Song of the Lark Thea Kronberg expresses this theory: "A child's attitude toward everything is an artist's attitude. I am more or less of an artist now, but then I was nothing else".³⁴ As Cather had stated early in her career: "Except ye be as a little child, ye shall not enter the kingdom of art"³⁵; and again: "While other boys are growing to be men, he grows to be a creator. An artist is a child always".³⁶ Of her own life Cather said that all her important experiences, all her vivid mental pictures had been acquired before the age of fifteen.³⁷

Cather's fictional career was to consist largely, then, of ordering and shaping the impressions and experiences of her adolescence, and in order to do this, she chooses protagonists who are young, artistic in temperament or inclination and similar in character to Cather herself: Jim Burden, Claude Wheeler, Neil Herbert, Nellie Birdseye. Thea Kronberg is drawn in part from Cather's own life and is thus autobiographical in nature; Professor St. Peter is identified with the young Tom Outland and with his youthful self, and like Alexander

Bartley represents the confrontation of the artist with middle-age. Even Archbishop Latour who is ageless is essentially an artist and has been chosen by Cather because of her specific concern for "the daily life of such a man [so well-bred and distinguished] in a crude frontier society".³⁸ The remaining characters tend often to be flat³⁹, presented from one angle only, and are frequently drawn directly from Cather's own life, as Marian Forrester was in real life Mrs. Silas Garber, Antonia was Annie Pavelka, and her husband and Neighbour Rosicky, Annie's husband. Grandfather Burden, the Harlings, Mahailey, the Erlichs: all have real prototypes. According to Bennett, Cather had intended from an early age to record these characters in fiction:

The ideas for all my novels have come from things that happened around Red Cloud when I was a child. . . . It happened that my mind was constructed for the particular purpose of absorbing impressions and retaining them. I always intended to write, and there were certain persons I studied. I seldom had much idea of the plot or the other characters, but I used my eyes and my ears.⁴⁰

Where Cather's author-surrogates are the narrators, either first person as My Antonia or third as in A Lost Lady and perhaps The Professor's House, these flat characters, observed from one angle of vision, succeed in conveying the world-vision of the protagonist and are unified and effective. Where Cather employs a position as omniscient narrator as in O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, One of Ours and Death Comes for the Archbishop, her early detachment,^{and} her identification with certain characters and viewpoints become a defect and destroy the objectivity of the work.

Through these fictional protagonists, Cather searches for something in human life which will provide a sense of order and

stability, first in nature, then in art, ultimately in religion.

Her art is highly personal, and is dependent for its existence upon some force outside of Cather herself which compelled her to write.

In the end, after Sapphira and the Slave Girl this force ceases to operate, as Sergeant describes:

The world we lived in now had moved on, with the Second World War, into a menacing period of change. Willa feared and hated the psychological repercussions of change, even in peacetime, and was increasingly troubled by the heroic and tragic disasters of the War. Moreover she was increasingly subject to illness. . . [and with the death of her closest family and friends] she had little spiritual margin with which to resist physical weakness and sorrow. Her seeming withdrawal from vital participation into a mold of almost rigid quietness resulted. She is saving herself for her work, I thought, and I believe she tried to do just that. Nevertheless, no other new books appeared in her lifetime. . . . Willa had apparently exhausted her own desire to write material based on memory and reminiscence of youth, and she certainly had no interest or gift for writing of contemporary life.⁴¹

Cather's real achievement in fiction, her contribution to American and world literature, has been extensively debated. By 1925, Maxwell Geismar notes, Cather had achieved "a reputation as one of the most gifted novelists of her period" and he assesses her as "one of the most complex, if not difficult and contradictory minds in our letters".⁴² While he concedes many weaknesses, in particular the evasion in her middle period of the social environment and "a dissipation of the writer's true energies", she is "less restricted than Edith Wharton, more intense than Ellen Glasgow".⁴³ And she is deeper than Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald and H. L. Mencken in her "sense of a human necessity whose origins are wild and whose destination is tragic" and her recognition that pleasure and pain are both poles of human existence.⁴⁴ Kronenberger claims her as

"the best American woman novelist of her time"⁴⁵; Lloyd Morris places her within the main trend of American literature in the last hundred years in her formulation of the democratic ideal, her emphasis upon pioneer virtues, and the cult of the individual and her epic vision of a national future⁴⁶ and the Blooms hail her as the twentieth century successor of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville and James in her concern for the frontier, for human salvation and destiny, and for art and moral realism.⁴⁷

Yet Canby, who calls her not the greatest novelist of the tens and twenties but "the most skilful and one of the best", qualifies his praise: "Her art is not a big art. It does not respond to the troubled sense of America's might and magnitude realized but undirected" and he concedes that she is national in significance but not in scope.⁴⁸ And John Randall in his extensive and perceptive study The Landscape and the Looking Glass summarizes his position:

[S]he remained all her life in a permanent emotional state of adolescent rebelliousness which was particularly apt to come to the surface if she did not get her own way. . . . I believe that her rebelliousness and rejection are not only reflected in her art but mold it; that she was able to transcend them only occasionally and only in her best work.⁴⁹

There is much truth in Randall's assessment. He notes her naive moral view of the world, a limited understanding of society, science and industrialism, and a tendency to retreat to childhood values when the world opposed her.⁵⁰ Yet if his assessment is accurate, what of Cather's intense popularity in the twenties, her rank of first place in American fiction in 1927, the rise in critical interest in the sixties?

To place Cather, as Bloom does, in the line of Hawthorne, Melville and James is misleading and retards an appreciation of Cather's true abilities. Cather's relationship to Henry James is perhaps the most evident, for she concedes in her Preface to Alexander's Bridge that she was influenced by James not only in style but also in subject matter and choice of character:

Alexander's Bridge was my first novel, and does not deal with the kind of subject-matter in which I now find myself most at home. The people and the places of the story interested me intensely at the time when it was written, because they were new to me and were in themselves attractive. . . . It is not always easy for the inexperienced writer to distinguish between his own material and that which he would like to make his own. Everything is new to the young writer, and everything seems equally impersonal. That which is outside his deepest experience, which he observes and studies, often seems more vital than that which he knows well.⁵¹

Although she does not mention James by name, she here is consciously rejecting the influence which has determined the shape and material not only of Alexander's Bridge but also of several short stories of The Troll Garden and Youth and the Bright Medusa, stories with a contrived urban setting and sophisticated characters who live in a world of art isolated from the bourgeois world about them. These short stories are curiously artificial, posed, although Alexander's Bridge has much more of Cather herself in it than she was later willing to concede. James himself refused to read the copy of The Troll Garden sent to him by Witter Brynner, replying wearily: "I find it the hardest thing in the world to read almost any new novel. Any is hard enough, but the hardest from the innocent hands of young females, young American females perhaps above all".⁵² This was harsh

criticism from the man whom she once said to have "the keenest mind any American ever devoted to the art of fiction".⁵³

But although Cather's strongest influence may be said to be Henry James⁵⁴, after 1911 she was moving in a direction opposite to that of James. Her artists are engaged in a personal quest for meaning, a quest which reflects her own. They are not unlike her pioneers and her saints: all dedicate themselves to something higher, something in the realm of the unattainable. That ultimately they should not succeed in reaching their highest ideals is implicit in the nature of such a quest.⁵⁵

Cather does share with Cooper an inheritance of European romanticism as it is applied to the American scene, the concern for a national identity, for the individual as against society, and for the pioneer values of self-sufficiency, courage, bravery and optimism. Yet her relationship to Hawthorne, Melville and Poe is tenuous, for all of these probe into the mind and soul of their characters, into the labyrinths of the secret self under the outer appearance. Hawthorne and Melville are preoccupied with the concept of sin in its universal aspects and its reflection on the personalities and daily lives of their protagonists. Poe is obsessed with death and with the relationship of sanity-madness in which the normal roles are reversed, the madman becoming sane in a mad world. These preoccupations are much deeper than Cather's mind and art can comprehend; in comparison her work seems shallow and self-centered rather than world-concerned. Where Hester and Dimmesdale, Ahab and Billy Budd, even Poe's haunted heroes reveal aspects of universal human nature, and what Melville calls

"the power of blackness" in the human mind, Cather's protagonists reveal only those characteristics which accord with her aspirations and ideals. She is shut off from universal experience by the limitations of her mind and her ability to comprehend any experience other than her own. While she does touch on evil and on the inability of the human mind to control its fate in her early works, she becomes increasingly bitter and therefore acid in her attitudes to society, America and even human destiny, and in the end she finds peace only by evading all central conflicts and complexities. Thus in many ways, O Pioneers! and My Antonia are her deepest works in their recognition of a complexity and ambiguity in life which is at times inexplicable and even contradictory. Her later refusal to face these elements in life indicates her wish to order and control life as well as art, and her inherent tendency to escape from unpleasantness, even though Quinn attempts to justify her: 'Miss Cather knows the evil, the weakness and pettiness of life, but while she never hesitates to describe them, she is not primarily concerned with them. Her primary interest is the pursuit of beauty'.⁵⁶

Perhaps it would be truer to recognize with Jones that she lacks a tragic sense; while she is capable of pathos, she cannot command tragedy because of her fixed belief that, in the words of the introduction to The Song of the Lark "to persons of vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen".⁵⁷ Nor is she a humorist, although Van Doren claims that she shares with Whitman a large tolerance, an abounding health, a savour of distance and the rapture of the earth, and a consciousness of America's past and future.⁵⁸

Even a cursory comparison of Whitman's poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers" with Cather's novel will indicate the limited nature of Cather's tolerance, her avoidance of sweat and toil, of elemental birth, sex and death which marks Whitman's vision. Wagenknecht comments on her "sanity, magnanimity, love of beauty, enthusiasm for living"⁵⁹ and Rapin on her Shakespearean balance which mirrors life as it truly is.⁶⁰ But Cather does not have the comic tolerance of Shakespeare, Chaucer and Browning. Her range of "felt life" is limited and she succeeds only within these certain limitations. As Footman observes, each of her protagonists has one destiny and only one⁶¹; she reveals her genius when she is able to find a "protagonist capable of devotion and a plot or theme which may embody her values" and "to place this against a background she loves, one which may excite a responsive mood".⁶² Perhaps Brynner best assesses not only her absence of the comic but also the predominance of a Swiftian bitterness in her middle period: "She took herself, not life but herself, too seriously to admit and enjoy the health of humour"; she cared for art without the healing humour to make the universe tolerable.⁶³

Cather's relationship to the major writers of her own era is likewise tenuous. Like them she faced the problems of a new century, a new mode of life, and a new experimentalism in the novel form. Yet she chose to remain isolated, rejecting their angle of vision and attempting to pattern herself on the more traditional James, Tolstoi and Flaubert. In many ways, her theory of literature is similar to that of Howells who defined realism as "nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material", "a faithful record of life".⁶⁴

Howells too held it the artist's duty to portray human nature which is "known to us all" and to convey beauty through portraying simplicity, naturalness and honesty.⁶⁵ And she would agree with Howells that realism fails when it "heaps up facts merely, and maps life instead of picturing it".⁶⁶

Yet Cather is not essentially a realist, although she does employ certain elements of realism, elements which are in truth inherited from romanticism; the emphasis upon sensuous perception, the concern for the everyday and common, the uneventful rather than the exceptional which Cather admires so much in Sarah Orne Jewett⁶⁷, what Foerster calls an "awareness of the complexities of inner life".⁶⁸ She would agree with Howells that the novelist should be concerned with: "the more smiling aspects of life" rather than with disease, death, sin, suffering and shame,⁶⁹ yet her own definition of realism enabled her to evade what Howells considers to be an essential part of real life, the world of industry and commerce which he portrays in The Rise of Silas Lapham: "But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candour with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme?"⁷⁰ This statement indicates clearly Cather's limitations as a writer: she must accept rather than choose, for her art is highly intuitive and largely beyond her conscious control. Where she moves outside her own range of experience and perception, she fails completely.⁷¹

In The Novel D meubl  she records clearly her reaction to naturalism. Although she admitted that he had "the stuff and power

of the novelist", she added "one could not call Dreiser an artist"⁷² and she attacked both Dreiser and Norris for their tendency to catalogue, to "prove" their case scientifically, and for their determinism which leads them to deal with human beings as a product of biological structure and social environments, what Parrington describes as "a complex of physical drives, dwelling in a mechanistic world, caught and destroyed in a web of internal and external forces".⁷³ She denies not only their choice of subject matter, but their attitude to style--an attitude indicated by Norris' comment: "who cares for fine style. . . . We don't want literature, we want life":⁷⁴

There is a popular superstition that "realism" asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations. . . . Is the story of a banker who is unfaithful to his wife and who ruins himself by speculation in trying to gratify the caprices of his mistresses, at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange? Of course, if the story is thin, these things do reinforce it in a sense--any amount of red meat thrown into the scale to make the beam dip. But are the banking system and the Stock Exchange worth being written about at all? Have such things any place in imaginative art?⁷⁵

Of Balzac she comments: "To reproduce on paper the actual city of Paris; the houses, the upholstery, the food, the wines, the game of pleasure, the game of business, the game of finance: a stupendous ambition--but, after all, unworthy of an artist"⁷⁶ and she offers in contrast Tolstoi who was "almost as interested in the way dishes were cooked, and people were dressed, and houses were furnished"⁷⁷ but who makes these "so much a part of the emotions of the people. . . the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves" that they become "part of the experience" of the novel.⁷⁸

Despite the apparent "realism" of the frontier life in parts of My Ántonia and The Song of the Lark, then, Cather is a true descendant of the Romantics. Her "real world" is largely the world of imagination and memory, not the physical or social or biological environment of the individual but the world within himself, the world of his hopes and fears and dreams. As Jim observes at the end of My Ántonia, "Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again".⁷⁹ While she chooses realistic details, her principle of selection is to create the "emotional penumbra" of the characters, and she evades any material which might be crude or raw, as Cécile evades the mention of "animal functions" in Shadows on the Rock. Her real view of the peasant, unwashed, odorous, and eating decayed cheese, appears not in the "realistic" novels but in the notebook records of Willa Cather in Europe.⁸⁰ Even the double murder of O Pioneers!, the violence of Shimerda's suicide, the seduction of Ántonia and the Peter-Pavel story narrated at second-hand, the war horrors of One of Ours and the eye-slitting episode of A Lost Lady are essentially Gothic rather than realistic and only enhance the romanticism of the hero.⁸¹

In "The Case Against Willa Cather" Hicks comments:

[In the early novels] one may feel that she deals with the unusual rather than the representative, and that what she omits is more important than what she includes. One may be conscious that the haze of regretful introspection distorts innumerable details. But one cannot deny that here is a beautiful and, as far as it goes, faithful re-creation of certain elements in the pioneering experience.⁸²

But he continues that her choice of nostalgia and the past denied even these elements in her later works, and eventually in Death Comes for

the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she has "created her ideal frontier and peopled it with fragments of her imagination".⁸³

This gentle romanticism is typical of the genteel tradition of the nineties which like Cather, emphasized the importance of culture and good breeding as counters to the crude manners and vulgar pretensions of the new moneyed class in commerce and industry. In The Background of American Literary Thought, Horton comments on the tendency of the age to ignore money while enjoying its luxuries, on its sentimentality, its moral idealism not always in accord with its behaviour, and its evasion of the unpleasant:

Our grandparents and great-grandparents felt that if they refused to recognize the sore spots of life those spots would somehow or other cease to exist. Consequently, the mention of such realities as death, disease, insanity, deformity, moral irregularity, money-making, crime, or other such controversial matters as religion, politics, or divorce were avoided as much as possible, with the idea that such things were disturbing.⁸⁴

While Cather did consider death and religion as suitable for fiction, commerce, disease, suffering and sin are evaded. Indeed her attitude to illness was almost neurotic, as she reveals when Sergeant returned from France with her leg damaged by bullets: "She was greatly sympathetic that I'd had bad luck--but she did easily shun the actual perception that an ankle or a leg had been filled full of steel: a human body should remain intact and as God had made it".⁸⁵ Politics she ignores; Sergeant notes "Willa and I could not talk of Wilson, nor of the Allies' feeding of the German". Nor is her interest in the Southwest similar to Sergeant's; she is concerned not with the attitude of the Pueblo to the War nor its anthropology but with its past: "landscape, the perspectives of history, the cliff dwellings".⁸⁶

Their only possible conversation concerns books and here Sergeant notes that Cather's tone in discussing post-war literature reflects the reaction of the genteel tradition to these new young writers; as recorded by Brooks in The Confident Years:

The burden of the new generation of novelists was a sort of pre-ordained despair, a note of defeat or failure, regression or decay that seemed to express the bewilderment of depolarized spirits, and among their characters morons abounded, with gangsters and mindless and primitive men, and with duped and put-upon children of all ages. While all these types existed in life, the novelists seemed to look for them because they were the opposite of the heroines of romantic fiction--superior beings with developed minds and wills--and because they were too rudimentary, too underdeveloped to exercise conscious choices on the moral plane. They invariably submitted, without question or protest, to fate. These writers, in their predominant feeling of chaos, had apparently lost sight of the spiritual poles.⁸⁷

When Main Street and Dos Passos' Three Soldiers appeared, Sergeant observes that Cather "had no patience with these precursors of the 'novel of protest' and the sociological fiction of the twenties".⁸⁸ Sinclair Lewis "had the point of view of the drummer who stops in the businessman's hotel; gossips with the loungers at the drug counter!"⁸⁹ Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters she "demolished with a word" and the Imagists she dismissed "severally and en masse".⁹⁰ Of modern drama she said:

O'Neill's stark revelations of lust, fear, weakness, cruelty, even poignant goodness, on the stage, offended her taste. Why spend an evening in Hades when there were still good comedies of manners--even of morals, say Galsworthy's, on Broadway.

Sergeant adds that Cather "never lost her own sense of the spiritual poles, or allowed her major characters to do so".⁹²

Yet despite her repudiation of these new writers, she shared more in common with them than she was willing to admit.⁹³ She later

became more friendly with both D. H. Lawrence and Sinclair Lewis. Indeed in 1920 Lewis said "The United States knows Nebraska because of Willa Cather's books" and is claimed to have said that she ought to have received the Nobel Prize in 1930 rather than he.⁹⁴ Moreover, despite her attack on Lewis for his treatment in Main Street of small town life as common and cheap, without reference to culture, music, art or languages, Cather's own statements of this in My Ántonia Book II, The Song of the Lark and A Lost Lady are within the same tradition and even more acrid than Lewis'. As Brown observes in "Homage to Willa Cather", she broke off her history of the decay of the small mid-western town just where Sinclair Lewis began his".⁹⁵ Her ultimate disillusionment with war and the society which caused it at the end of One of Ours is not unique or isolated but appears in other contemporary fiction: Hemingway's Farewell to Arms, Faulkner's Soldiers' Pay, Laurence Stallings' Plumes and his and Anderson's What Price Glory?.⁹⁶ Indeed she anticipated these writers whose works appeared several years after One of Ours, although the mood and technique of the works as a whole are totally unlike. And The Professor's House deals with the ills of society as truly as any sociological novel of the late twenties and thirties, although perhaps from a differing viewpoint.

In style and technique, structure and character development, Cather is innovative and experimental. My Ántonia and The Professor's House order events through the association of a central character; Death Comes for the Archbishop combines several layers of description, narrative and inset tales through their impingement again on one central protagonist. A Lost Lady and My Mortal

Enemy have stripped the novel form to essentials and thrown the furniture out of the window to leave "one passion and four walls".⁹⁷

Cather's limitation for a modern audience does not lie then in technical ability nor in an out-dated handling of theme, character, structure and language. Perhaps her central weakness as Randall suggests is her failure to develop beyond the world-view of the adolescent.⁹⁸ Her best treatments are those which deal either with life as seen from the point of view of a youthful narrator, or those which accept the premise of Oscar Wilde's Lord Henry "The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young".⁹⁹ This philosophical naiveté controls her outlook and is revealed early in her statement that man realizes his strongest emotions and most important experiences before the age of fifteen¹⁰⁰, and late in Death Comes for the Archbishop where her dedicated priest Vaillant defines success in terms of youthful vision: "To fulfil the dreams of one's youth; that is the best that can happen to a man. No worldly success can take the place of that".¹⁰¹ Yet while this may explain her ultimate failure in breadth, maturity and complexity, it also defines her strength, and her genius in capturing like Wordsworth the emotions of youth. For Cather does succeed in conveying these perceptions and emotions in fictional form as Wordsworth does in poetic form. She suggests Dickens', too, in her identification of the artist with the child. Maurice Beebe notes that the success of David Copperfield lies in its "evoking the lost world of the child's imagination. . . [before it has] given way to the objectivity of experience".¹⁰²

The artist in Dickens¹ retains the child's vision of life. If this explains some of his weaknesses as a novelist--his philosophical naiveté, his inability to write of sexual love, his sentimentality--it explains also some of his unique power. Seeming actuality distorted by the imagination, numerous images of sentient things, grotesque characters swelling larger and deflating smaller than life, a technique of 'signature', a compulsive imagery of retreats that resemble a child's attic or tree-top "castle", a constant fluidity of time and space--these are the things that make Dickens¹ art childlike.¹⁰³

Cather's weaknesses too are sentimentality, naiveté and the almost complete absence of sexual love in any novel but O Pioneers! and perhaps A Lost Lady. And her strengths lie in her vivid recreation of setting and persons through the sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch; in her emphasis upon the private world of the imagination which shapes and interprets events; even in her projection of characters as they appear to the mind of the adolescent: Mrs. Shimerda, Wick Cutter, Marian Forrester and Ivy Peters, Myra Henshawe, Pierre Charron. Finally her images suggest a similar series of retreats. The little attic room where she grew up appears directly in The Song of the Lark and "The Best Years", indirectly in the Professor's attic, and metamorphised in the rock retreat of the Cliff Dwellers and Tom Outland. In turn each of the major orders which Cather seeks become a retreat. Jim Burden and Neighbour Rosicky find in Nature a close union with the soil and the seasonal pattern, which releases them from the burdens of society. While Thea embraces art as an end in itself, the Professor turns to it as a temporary refuge from the problems of his society and his family. And ultimately religion becomes a faith where "seeking is finding"¹⁰⁴, particularly when set in a past which will never return to America and which therefore can be ordered and controlled

to make it safer and more secure than the present.

As Dorothy Canfield Fisher noted, Cather is exceptional in that she retains in her fiction the poetic response to life of April Twilights, the belief that "youth and the emotions of youth, because of their great intensity and simplicity, surpass all other emotions".¹⁰⁵ Her best novels present the tension between the lost past of youth and the present knowledge of maturity. Wright Morris' comment on chapter nineteen of Huckleberry Finn applies equally well to My Ántonia:

[It] is the memory of a man, processed to appear as the vision of a boy. . . . The emotion has processed this memory into art. . . . It was the knowledge of the loss--the man's knowledge--that generated what was timeless in the boy's impressions.¹⁰⁶

The Song of the Lark, My Ántonia and parts of O Pioneers! recreate in art both the lost past of Cather herself and of the American prairie, a past lamented in One of Ours and A Lost Lady where youth is stultified by the shallowness and sterility of the present and where the contrast lies not between what the hero is and what he has been, but between what he is and what he might have become. Alexander's Bridge and The Professor's House both convey effectively the desire of middle-age to recreate its lost youth and the tragic recognition that "it is in middle life that the complex man cannot evade his psychological fate".¹⁰⁷

Cather's very theory of art is determined by this faith in youth and its centrality; in an early edition of The Song of the Lark, Cather observes:

Wagner says in his most beautiful opera that art is only a way of remembering youth. And the older we grow, the more precious it seems to us, and the more richly we can present that memory.

When we've got it all out. . . then we stop. We can do nothing but repeat after that.¹⁰⁸

Thus she anticipates the failure of her own artistic vision. In Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock Cather reaches a position of stasis, a stasis which is non-vital and unreal. There is no longer the conflict of desire with reality, of a lost past with an empty present, of youth with age; these last novels substitute for the complexity of the earlier novels an unreal breadth achieved through the use of inset and panorama. Sergeant tells us: "[Cather] said more than once to me that nobody under forty could ever really believe in either death or degeneration. She herself carried that physical non-chalance right on through her fifties".¹⁰⁹ But when she comes to acknowledge in The Professor's House the inexorable nature of death and even its undeniable attraction, she has also to face the concomitant death of her art. In the end, Sergeant observes, she ceased to write when she "had apparently exhausted her own desire to write material based on memory and reminiscence of youth, and certainly had no interest or gift for writing of contemporary life".¹¹⁰

This inability to deal with the modern world is Cather's second major weakness and marks even more clearly the limitations of her scope. In the Preface to Not Under Forty, she remarks bitterly:

The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts, and the persons and prejudices recalled in these sketches slid back into yesterday's seven thousand years. . . . It is for the backward, and by one of their number, that these sketches were written.¹¹¹

As Brynner notes, this crisis is personal rather than social, occurring within herself, for "War and Death and change had always been".¹¹²

Yet to Cather the year 1922 signified some point at which the present

world detached itself from the past and formed the alien environment in which she was to live and which she was to reject for the rest of her life.

In truth, the year 1922 only brings to a head a recognition which has been born in My Ántonia and which she phrased as early as 1914: "Our present is ruined--but we had a beautiful past".¹¹³ Moreover it is not unique, but part of the protest of the nineteenth century to the birth of a new era. In 1920 Yeats asks "What rough beast, its hour come at last/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"¹¹⁴, Hardy in the preface to Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) observes "we seem threatened with a new dark age",¹¹⁵ and Lord Grey in his autobiography Twenty-Five Years recalls dawn over London on August 4, 1914: "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime".¹¹⁶ The war is not so much the cause as the reflection of this change, the replacement of an agricultural and basically aristocratic way of life by the industrialism and speed, the impersonality of the machine and urban life in the twentieth century.

Cather and her American contemporaries chose 1922 as the year of crisis; like Grey, Leonard Woolf chose August 1, 1914 to mark "the death of civilization" as we know it.¹¹⁷ In his autobiography Beginning Again he contrasts the present and the immediate past in his description of the countryside near Newhaven and Brighton:

That day now fifty years ago we passed, a quarter of a mile from Ascham, Itford Farm, the house standing much as it did five hundred years before and looking onto a valley which, except for the railway line, had changed little since 1414. In Southease

we passed the Church which stood there unchanged for seven hundred years, the farm which was unchanged since the eighteenth century, the rectory hidden by trees, and two or three cottages. After Southease across the down, the fields of stubble or uncut corn in the hollows, the shepherd and his great flock of sheep and his dog on the top or on the slopes, and no sign of human habitation all the way to the sea. . . .

No sane man would walk to Peacehaven from Ascham today, for on the way he would see lovely downs spattered with ugly buildings and, when he got there, he would find all round him, as far as the eye can see, miles of disorderly ugliness, shoddiness and squalor. If one has to choose between the sheep and the sheep-dog, not to speak of the shepherd, of 1914, and the respectable devotees of TV, football pools, and bingo who flock together into the hideous houses which in 1963 are flung together higgledy-piggledy in Peacehaven, then I am not sure that one should not prefer the civilization of the sheep.¹¹⁸

Cather would have been in sympathy with Woolf's statement for the grounds upon which she rejects the present are the same. She cherishes the old, the historic and unchanging patterns of life in an agricultural order, and opposes the development of urbanization, the ugliness and squalor which replace beauty, the cheap and shallow entertainments of a machine society.

In his Two Cultures, C. P. Snow remarks that few intellectual men understood the industrial revolution, and no writers; Thoreau, Emerson, Ruskin, William Morris, Lawrence: all saw the chimneys and the backstreets of these new urban developments but not the opportunities that opened up for the poor.¹¹⁹ He points out that the individual may choose to "do a modern Walden", despise food and literacy, watch his children die in infancy and lose twenty years of his own life, but he should not condemn others to these conditions: "In any country where they have had the chance, the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them".¹²⁰ But Cather rejects the present, searching for sanctuary in the past. She

found in Mrs. Fields home at 148 Charles Street such a refuge:

[Here was] an atmosphere in which one seemed absolutely safe from everything ugly. . . . The past lay in wait for one in all the corners; it exuded from the furniture, from the pictures, the rare editions, and the cabinets of manuscripts. . . . It was a place where the past lived on--where it was protected and cherished, had sanctuary from the noisy push of the present.¹²⁴

After Mrs. Field's death, 148 Charles Street was demolished and replaced by a garage, symbol of modern society. Cather could not accept the change and write of the present, nor did she wish to; she rejects the material of commerce and industry as unsuitable for art: "Are the Banking system and the Stock Exchange worth being written about at all? Have such things any proper place in imaginative art?"¹²² And she turns back to the past, safe and secure, as it still exists in the American southwest. She commented to Sergeant:

To quit industrialized urbanity, to explore on horseback ancient America where primitive pioneering conditions still prevailed, and the overwhelming drama of nature still ruled men's minds and thoughts, must have been, Willa said, an immense release from wounds and world problems.¹²³

Howard Mumford Jones calls Cather "in no sense an escapist" for she has been "content to show what life is or may be when it is lived away from the false fevers of civilization"¹²⁴ and J. Donald Adams claims that artists who turn to the past are often more contemporary than those who deal with the present: "When they penetrate beyond the externals of living, when they deal creatively with the spirit of man, with its tests and triumphs, its defeats and aspirations, its interminable march toward self-realization, they speak to us here and now".¹²⁵ Yet Cather's perception of the past even in the Southwest was clouded by her idealism. She ignored Sergeant's reply

that the Southwest too was a stratified society like the British or French, with the Anglos on top, the Mexicans in the middle, and the Indians at the bottom.¹²⁶ Sergeant admits that, while she does not like Freud, she must read him because he is here: "I lived in to-day's world. But Willa, like the Pueblo Indians who--I had been told in New Mexico--had no word for 'future', looked backward with regret".¹²⁷ Hicks is essentially accurate when he observes that Cather chose the past, not because she could deal more effectively with human passions and relationships, but because it permitted her "to order events according to her own ideals. . . . Having turned to the past as a refuge and not because of some perception of the relation of the past to the present, she could do nothing but paint pretty pictures".¹²⁸

Thus Cather's very limitations as an artist at once narrow the range of her art and create the poignancy with which she treats certain areas of human experience. While there is some truth in Randall's complaint that Cather viewed the moral world naively from the viewpoint of the child, dividing men into good and bad and retreating into these values when the world opposed her¹²⁹, she shares certain of these weaknesses with Dickens whose fame cannot be denied. Her tendency too to present effectively, in three-dimensional form, only those characters who are in reality author-surrogates is not in itself a defect, for both Joyce and Tolstoi are essentially autobiographical; War and Peace is said to be "peopled with Tolstoi's relatives"¹³⁰ and Joyce conceded: "I fear. . . that I have little imagination". Both too are retrospective, looking back to another era or another period

of life and both admitted that their life itself lacked wisdom and charity. Yet they are great because they are able to transmute their experience into art, to select only the best and to discard the rest. Their ability lies in their presentation of life from a new perspective; it is said of Tolstoi that he "wrote as if rediscovering the human race".¹³¹ While this cannot be said of Cather, nevertheless her fiction has been esteemed in the past for her presentation in fiction of life as she saw it in the Middle and Southwest at the junction of the pioneering era with modern civilization. While Sherman may not be accurate in his ultimate assessment of Cather's work in 1926, he is accurate in assessing the popular response of the day to the Cather that they knew and understood:

[Cather is] one of the true classics of our generation. . . . Her work has a vital centre, and its contours become steadily more distinct. It will become clear to us presently that she has been expressing these last ten or fifteen years a new sense of values which we are all gradually and often unconsciously beginning to accept. She has been clarifying for us our sense of what we have in common with the generation before 1900, and our sense of the points at which we have departed from the old paths. . . . [She has given us] a criticism of life both profound and acute-- a criticism which deals with the simple elements as with the fine complexities of human experience.

[In her books] Miss Cather has sought to record the quest of her generation for true romance, for the real thing, for that which enables one to forget everything else, for that which consumes one adequately.¹³²

PART I: THE ORDER OF NATURE

1. INTRODUCTION

What is Nature?

In his essay "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms", Arthur Lovejoy notes that there are more than sixty distinctive senses of "nature".¹ Nevertheless the term is used in literature in a limited sense, and we are able to assume from the context the author's range of association. Emerson in his "Nature" distinguishes between the strict use and the commonly accepted use:

Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. . . . Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. Art is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture.²

J. W. Beach agrees primarily with this second definition, but widens it in accordance with Romantic practice: "In its humblest and commonest sense, nature refers to the 'beauteous forms/ of the external world, as distinguished from man and his works'.³ Yet, he continues, Cowper's assumption "God made the country and man made the town" reflects a division between the natural and the artificial in which ploughed fields and church spires are accepted as "natural" since they are closer to Nature and its original intention⁴ and he defines nature more freely as a "state of life untouched by human arts and institutions".⁵

Nature in the nineteenth century becomes the rival of reason, the celebration of the "natural" in human life, through the imagination and the emotion, and Wordsworth's celebration of the child and the

peasant as free from the taint of society is based on the ideal of the Golden Age, the celebration of the simple rural life in the classics as the source of goodness and wisdom, and the economic theory of "natural law" and the cult of the noble savage.⁶ Lovejoy similarly defines nature as belonging either to the external universe which "come[s] into being independently of human effort and contrivance", or to the human mind "those attributes which are most spontaneous, unpremeditated, untouched by reflection or design, and free from the bondage of social convention".⁷

An examination of the role of Nature in Willa Cather's fiction will reveal several categories: the natural landscape untouched by man, the agricultural order which merges man with nature, the pioneer who faces the heroic challenge of nature and tests his courage and endurance against the universe, and finally, nature as a counter to society, as a form of escape from the problems and realities of the present world. Thus she draws upon the traditions of Romanticism in her choice of nature over society, in her emphasis upon the simple lives of the child and the peasant, in her implication that the agricultural life and the life of the pioneer is purer than that of society and less tainted by human frailties, and her emphasis upon the "natural" aspects of the human mind, passion and imagination rather than reason and intellect.

Cather and the Tradition of Nature in the Western American Novel

The importance of nature as a centre of order in Willa Cather's fiction is closely linked to her own relationship to Nature, in particular to her experience of the American Mid-West before 1900. This relationship is integral to her own development, but is also dual and ambiguous, as real relationships always are. In an interview for the Omaha

World Herald, Cather records the intensity of passion which she felt for the prairies of her youth:

Whenever I crossed the Missouri River coming into Nebraska the very smell of the soil tore me to pieces. I could not decide which was the real and which the fake me. I almost decided to settle down and let my writing go. . . . I knew every farm, every field in the region around my home and they all called out to me. My deepest feelings were rooted in this country because one's strongest emotions and one's most vivid mental pictures are acquired before one is fifteen.⁸

This love of the land, this fierce attraction for a way of life which seems real, intense, vital, is reflected in Cather's important novels O Pioneers! and My Ántonia and, to a much lesser extent, in The Song of the Lark, The Professor's House, Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock and "Neighbour Rosicky". But there is another side to Cather's relationship to Nebraska. Her early short stories bitterly attack the cultural narrowness and the stultifying conditions of agricultural life, and later sections of O Pioneers! and My Ántonia reflect the Revolt-from-the-Village tradition of the teens and twenties. This tension is evident in the life of Cather herself, the ambivalence between idealization of the agrarian idyll and bitter condemnation of the conditions of rural life, between country and city, West and East. Miss Sergeant records:

After a few months in the city, she got wildly homesick for the West. She would dash out to see her "family". . . and the wheat harvest, and then flee back to Pittsburgh to Isabella McClung--for fear of dying in a cornfield. . . . You have not seen those miles of fields. There is no place to hide in Nebraska. You can't hide under a windmill.⁹

When she was in the East, she forgot everything but the sharp, specific flavour. Once there, an unreasoning fear of being swallowed up by the distances between herself and anything else jumped out at her--as in childhood, again. On the plains the wind is a soporific. She was afraid to drowse and dream.¹⁰

This tension between attraction and rejection, this dual re-

sponse to Nature, is not unique in Cather but indeed is typical of much of the "farm-fiction" of this era. It reflects two basic theories of the West, as Henry Nash Smith notes. The myth of the West as the Garden of the World, the promised land of democracy and individual rights, of economic prosperity, of simplicity, virtue and happiness, is reflected in the celebration in American literature of: "fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth".¹¹ In conflict is "the triumphant official cult of progress. . . a glorious victory of civilization over savagery and barbarism".¹² These two attitudes to the West Smith finds reflected in the two myths of Daniel Boone, the expansionist who opens up the continent to civilization, and the anarchist who moves west because "a d--d Yankee came, and settled down within an hundred miles of me".¹³

In his study The Mid-West Farm Novel, Meyers reveals this ambiguity in fiction. The nostalgia for a lost past, which is a predominant mood of most farm fiction, is mixed as in Hamlin Garland with a tone of resentment or indignation.¹⁴ We find the same ambivalence in Sinclair Lewis' Main Street where Lewis is drawn to his small town yet denounces it not only for its stereotyped patterns of living, its loss of vitality and contact with nature, but also for its cultural sterility, its narrowness and parochialism which are in effect part of its rural inheritance. Cather objected to Main Street as a novel of protest which gave a biased picture of small-town America:

[Sinclair is] satisfied to get an external view of the small prairie centre. She explained, defensively, that in every town like Gopher Prairie there existed at least one family, probably several, where, at least in one field, standards of world culture, music, the arts, the languages were preserved. . . . When Sinclair

Lewis looked at his small town, he found nothing of the sort-- only commonness, cheapness, ignorance.¹⁵

Yet O Pioneers! at least suggests the narrowness of country life, and both The Song of the Lark and My Ántonia set the tradition for Main Street by a thorough denunciation of cultural sterility in small town life, as reflected by their comments on Church musical concerts and Church choirs, and on their hostility to culture and the artist.

In truth, it is the tension between these two attitudes to Nature which, effectively and honestly recorded for us in the early novels, makes of them important works of art. Later Cather turns to the land as refuge, as idyll, as nostalgic dream. She is influenced by her own softened attitudes towards the country of her youth, and she forgets the weaknesses, the deprivations, the fluctuating unhappinesses, in recreation of her dream. Her novels are no longer true: "Neighbour Rosicky" is effective as an idyll but as a real assessment of rural life it is biased and didactic, ignoring or evading basic issues of life. And Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock project a life in nature which belongs to the art of the cinema: panoramic, magnificent, awe-inspiring, but no longer a vital part of everyday life. In moving away from her past, in searching for an easy reconciliation between two points of view which are basic to human emotions and which cannot easily be reconciled, Cather evades the major problems of human life in connection with Nature and the land. And Nature becomes a form of sanctuary from a mechanistic world which she can no longer face.

Cather's new dedication to Nature after 1911 is indicated in her

choice of the local colour tradition for her novels O Pioneers! and My Antonia. At its best, local colour fiction is one of the important traditions of American literature, and Hamlin Garland's plea to W. D. Howells for a regional literature is a challenge equal to that of Emerson and Hawthorne for a native American literature:

American literature, in order to be great, must be national, and in order to be national, must deal with conditions peculiar to our own land and climate. Every genuinely American writer must deal with the life he knows best and for which he cares the most.¹⁶

The central characteristics of "local-colour" fiction are the use of choice of a particular geographic setting and the emphasis upon its particular flavour or character as revealed in its characters, dialect, dress and local mannerisms. It differs from regional literature largely in stressing these peculiarities rather than basic sociological distinctions in the behaviour of the characters as they are affected by local manners and history.¹⁷ Its dangers, as Major, Smith and Pearce point out in their study Southwest Heritage, are "sentimentality, romanticism and provincialism" and it fosters nostalgia, in its concern for a particular flavour or quaintness, which looks to the rural and past,¹⁸ for the present with its urban standardization and the uniformity of Main Street destroys its very foundations; Chesterton has said, cities are not individual: "[In Minneapolis] the factory chimneys might have been Pittsburgh, the sky signs might have been New York."¹⁹ As well, characters and settings may become stereotyped, and Flanagan notes that in general, mid-Western farm novels present little plotting, few individual characters, a style which is accurate but impoverished, and over-detailed narrative and background.²⁰

Cather's use of this tradition is distinctively Western, differing from Eastern regional fiction in concern, form and function. John Milton observes in his study "The Western Novel; Sources and Forms:"

[The land is central.] It is the land which has determined human history and the patterns of settlement, and it is the land which has provided the writer with his particular materials as well as his attitude towards them. . . . Perhaps, then, the chief distinction of the western novel is its necessary reliance on qualities and materials which are primitive in contrast to the sophistication and artificiality of metropolitan culture and advanced civilization.²¹

The tone of the novel is set by this close contact with the land, and it is frequently poetic and evocative in style:

The rhythm is essentially emotional while the form is intellectual. . . . The mark of the mature western novel seems to be the tension which exists significantly between the rational and the irrational, between the extremes of beauty and harshness, and between the emotions of rhythm and the meaning of them. . . . Its context is a fusion of history with immediacy, because the western past is recent and available; its tone is pastoral, because the land itself is an ever-present influence, and its style is lyrical, because the major confrontation is still with the elemental mysteries of nature.²²

Its centre is the quest of the protagonist, who is both the American knight,²³ and the reader himself, not for social or political answers but for eternal truths of human nature and for spiritual maturity or the goals of the artist.²⁴ It has, then, two aspects, the realistic presentation of the hero's struggle with the land, and the more lyric descriptions of beauty and wonder in the local setting: "the western regional novel is constantly in a state of rhythm, an ebb and flow between the brutal and the beautiful, the painfully real and the ideal, the wonder and actuality of recognition."²⁵

In her introduction to the collected stories of Sarah Orne

Jewett, Cather indicates that she understands the true qualities of regional fiction, for Jewett's stories "melt into the land and the life of the land until they are not stories at all, but life itself."²⁶ Jewett's fiction is unlike other New England regional fiction which makes use of "more startling 'situations'" and which are "more heavily accented, more elaborately costumed and posed in the studio."²⁷ Her characters are simple country men and women who "grew out of the soil and the life of the country near her heart," not "exceptional individuals at war with their environment."²⁸ Their language is local and pithy, their design "so right, that it seems inevitable"²⁹ and their form organic like the Greek classics.³⁰ Altogether the stories "imply" its history, suggest its attitude toward the world, and its way of accepting life."³¹

Where Cather follows these ideals, she is successful in creating great literature in the tradition of the regionalist. But the form is not native to her. Only *Ántonia* and perhaps *Rosicky* could be described as central characters who are yet typical of their region. Her other heroes are "exceptional individuals at war with their environment,": Bartley Alexander, Alexandra Bergson, Thea, Jim Burden, Neil Herbert, Claude Wheeler, Marian Forrester, Professor St. Peter, Tom Outland, Archbishop Catour, even Joseph Vaillant. They do not grow naturally out of the soil but are transplanted to a new region, usually as immigrants, where they survive or die through their success or failure in imposing their own pattern upon the life around them. Cather does not make use of "startling 'situations'" but her characters do often suggest posing, as in Jim's memory of *Ántonia*:

Ántonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade--that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer.³²

The language is not local or native, and there is always the intervention of a narrator, an author-surrogate, who interprets and selects scene, character, even action. Where the setting is evoked for its sensational or picturesque qualities rather than for its important relation to everyday life; where the presentation of life is romanticized and unreal, selected for a particular purpose or to prove a point rather than chosen for its typical qualities; where local customs are exploited for their strangeness and difference rather than woven into the pattern of life--there we have the weaknesses of the local-colour tradition. And in her later fiction, Cather exhibits these weaknesses, despite brilliant use of setting as backdrop and panorama. And in this tradition, weakened and romanticized, lies the decadence of Nature as a central theme in American fiction.

'Mein Geliebtest Land:'

Last summer, in a season of intense heat, Jim Burden and I happened to be crossing Iowa on the same train. . . . The dust and the heat, the burning wind, reminded us of many things. We were talking about what it is like to spend one's childhood in little towns like these, buried in wheat and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate. . . . We agreed that no one who had not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it.³³

Willa Cather's own response to the land of the American West is a basic determinant in her fiction, indeed the very source of literary inspiration, as Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant records for us:

Any thoroughly untamed aspect of nature refreshed her. She said that the air was totally different where fields had never been

cleared and harvested nor virgin forests cut. When I thought about this, I saw that her intimacy with nature lay at the very root of her relation to O Pioneers!--and indeed of her power to work at all.³⁴

This deeply rooted love of the land, first revealed to Cather herself in her novel O Pioneers!, accounts for her new approach to fiction after 1911. Yet there is earlier evidence of this attraction in her slim volume of poetry April Twilights and in "Prairie Spring"(1912) which became the theme of O Pioneers!:

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and sombre and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
The toiling horses, the tired men;
The long empty roads,
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
The eternal, unresponsive sky.

In fiction, however, Cather had followed other paths, dealing in Jamesian fashion with the predicaments of the artist in a society which was still largely unknown to her, and occasionally with the more familiar predicament of the artist as alien in his rural environment. Here it is the limitations of an agricultural life, its stultifying effect upon culture, with which she is occupied. In "A Wagner Matinée", Aunt Georgie turns to her nephew after the end of Siegfried's funeral march and cries: "I don't want to go, Clark, I don't want to go!" and the narrator continues:

I understood. For her, just outside the concert hall, lay the black pond with the cattle-tracked bluffs; the tall, unpainted house, with weather-curved boards, naked as a tower; the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dishcloths hung to dry; the gaunt, moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door.³⁵

Occasionally Cather recreates the power of the land, but it is a power

which is alien to man. The hero of "Peter", like old Mr. Shimerda, commits suicide; Clara of "The Bohemian Girl" escapes with her lover for the narrowness of country life to the world beyond. Eric Hermanson, whose personality mirrors the untamed savagery and masculine power of nature, is warped and embittered. "On the Divide" is the Divide between wild and alien nature and civilization. Perhaps "The Enchanted Bluff" (1909) is one of the few early stories to assert the positive aspects of a life close to nature and the land.

Thus it was a new revelation to Cather when she discovered in O Pioneers! her real, almost her destined subject-matter. Later in the Preface to Alexander's Bridge she was to say that she had found her way by inspiration, as "our feet find the road home on a dark night,"³⁶ even allowing her material to mould the form and technique:

She had let the story run along at its own pace and length, without trimming it to pattern. The country insisted on being the Hero and she did not interfere, for the story came out of the long grasses, she felt, like Dvorak's New World Symphony.³⁷

Cather's real love for the wide plains of central Nebraska is the heart of the novel, and the theme may be stated by Alexandra: "We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while."³⁸ That the land also represents a force alien to man, overwhelming, almost subduing efforts to subdue and control it, is also evident in the novel. But the tension between this alien element and nature, controlled and beneficent, adds depth to the novel and Cather delights in its violence and power as well as its beauty. Cather has come to terms with her own emotions concerning her prairie background and is

able to convey these effectively through her fiction.

The first novel to make use of the land as subject, O Pioneers! recreates most effectively this new vision of the land as powerful, beautiful and challenging:

The great fact was the land itself. . . . He felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness.³⁹

It is unending, monotonous, and it defeats John Bergson: "There it lay outside his door, the same land, the same lead-coloured miles. He knew every ridge and draw and gully between him and the horizon."⁴⁰ The little town "anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away."⁴¹ The fertility of the land, the immense beauty and warm benevolence, does not appear in the section "The Wild Lands"; it is a product of the humanization of the prairie by man. The opening of My Ántonia also suggests the remoteness, the inaccessibility, the unending space, of the West:

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land; not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. . . . I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it.⁴²

But the ecstasy of the wild land, the exhilaration and vitality of a Nature uncontrolled by man are also part of Jim's experience:

Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but rough, shaggy red grass, most of it as tall as I. . . . I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it heads of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping. . . . I wanted to walk straight on through the red grass and over the edge of the world.⁴³

Even winter is exhilarating, destroying life but brilliant, stimulating,

active: "The sky was brilliantly blue, and the sunlight on the glittering white stretches of prairie was almost blinding. . . . The wind had the burning taste of fresh snow."⁴⁴ These two novels are the peak of Willa Cather's evocation of the World of Nature, in the full force of its power and its beauty. "Neighbour Rosicky" again returns to the idyll of agrarian life, but the tale is didactic: it is concerned with proving that the country is superior to the town, and its incidents and summarized narration are chosen specifically to underline this thesis. Rosicky belongs to the world of nature; all he wishes of life is contact with the ground, with earth and animals and growing things which the cement of the city prevent, "to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow."⁴⁵ Yet he is not a pioneer, not a hero; he is essentially passive, living his life in a quiet routine close to nature. The land too has changed. Although there have been droughts, blights, plagues of grasshoppers, hard winters and blazing summers, the story is narrated retrospectively, and the harsh effect of these events is subdued by the mood of the narrator who stresses the joys of the country in contrast to the hardships, the cruelties and emptiness and unhappiness of the town. The land is softened, controlled and responsive. Even Death is negated. Rosicky's grave is described not in terms of Death but in terms of the recreation of life through seasonal rebirth. Cather's longing for a refuge from a modern society which she can no longer tolerate is satisfied in her agrarian myth, and the Land exists no longer as a vital force, a character or Hero, but as a place of seclusion from "the noisy push of the present."⁴⁶

The second group of novels, which deals with the order of art and the deviation of modern society from the ideal of the artist, makes little direct use of the love of the land. The recognition of the power of nature, the attraction of the artistic élite to the land and to nature, provides a means of determining the chosen. But a life in nature is no longer possible for the artist; he has chosen society and the urban world, and he must oppose its forces in order to shape his ideals. Nature thus becomes a refuge, a source of strength and inspiration, or a temporary refuge against the invasions of materialist life. The Song of the Lark is written before My Ántonia, and the early section of Thea's childhood seems to follow the earlier pattern of a life close to nature, with the alternation of the seasons and the descriptive evocation of landscape. But with the beginning of the Chicago section, the author loses interest in this phase of her subject, and Thea never returns to Moonstone or indeed to the West as a way of life, rejecting it for first Chicago, then Europe and the East. Nature is important as a part of her development, but it is important only recollectively:

There were memories of light on the sandhills, of masses of prickly pear blossoms she had found in the desert in early childhood, of the late afternoon sun pouring through the grape leaves and the mind bed in Mrs. Kohler's garden, which she would never lose. These recollections were a part of her mind and personality.⁴⁷

Even Panther Canyon, an important (although one may feel, an artistically contrived) part of Thea's education, is retrospective rather than real. She rejects the invitation of the land--"how easy it would be to dream one's life out in some cleft of the world,"⁴⁸--because she becomes "tired of the desert and the dead races, of a world without

change or ideas."⁴⁹ While the Southwest has been a real part of Thea's experience like the sun and the sand "the earliest sources of gladness that she can remember--", ⁵⁰ it is tenuously connected with her expanding vision of art.⁵¹

Both A Lost Lady and One of Ours record the loss of nature and the power of the land in modern American life, the first in the present, juxtaposing the old pioneer society which preserves the marshes with the new commercial society which destroys them, and the second in the past. There is no future for America in the land. Claude turns to Europe, to the rural bliss of France, but the landscape is unreal, literary and idealized rather than evocative and vital, and it too is a landscape of the past, preserved into the present by the less industrialized Europeans but doomed still to fall, if not through Germany, then through America, whose pervading presence is symbolized by the brightly-painted reaping machines in the age-old fields.

In The Professor's House, Cather moves away from real experience for vicarious experience through Tom Outland who is not a living character in the novel but a myth. The Professor turns for strength to the lake, to his garden, and to the memory of Tom and the Blue Mesa, but nature is no longer strong enough to influence his future life, although in the past it has inspired the design and structure of his art, and he faces modern society without any alternative. And Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock turn to the American past, where Nature is still a vital force, a determinant of the patterns of life. Yet, the descriptions, although highly effective in isolation, are set-pieces, beautiful landscapes which

have really no connection with the action of the novel. They are not part of the fibre of life but backdrops, vast, exciting, poetically evoked and yet unreal and remote from life. The tension is gone; we look back from a historical perspective. The land which has been in O Pioneers! malignant, overwhelming "the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes"⁵² is no longer unconquerable but already tamed, seen in retrospect as romantically wild and remote without the uncertainty of the present. The central characters do not really face its challenge, although they may seem to vicariously, the Archbishop through Vaillant, and Cecile through Pierre Charron, the unbelievable coureur de bois of the Canadian wilderness.

Thus Cather's love of the land, which Sergeant notes to be "at the very root. . . of her power to work at all"⁵³ passes through several stages: her first recognition of the shaping force of the land in her life and her art in O Pioneers! and My Ántonia; her rejection of the land as a possible way of life for the artist, as a possible and viable alternative to society in her middle fiction; finally her return to a land which has never really been hers, the land of the eighteenth century Southwest and seventeenth century Quebec, remote, exotic and exciting but no longer real. The nostalgia, only suggested in "Mein Geliebtest Land" of O Pioneers!, becomes a definite theme in My Ántonia and eventually a way of life. It resolves the problems of modern society by retreating to the faraway and the past, to an idyllic Eden, uncontaminated by man.

Nature: The Agricultural Order

The rise of farm-fiction in America coincided with the rapid increase of industrialism at the end of the nineteenth century, just as its prototype, the Nature poetry of the Romantics, had developed in part as a protest to the new urbanization of England after the Industrial Revolution. As Flanagan observes in The Middle Western Farm Novel, the movement of the population towards the towns corresponds with a renewal of interest in life close to the land: "People revolted physically against rural life only to recreate it artistically in fiction."⁵⁴ Willa Cather was well in the forefront of this new literary movement, and thus her themes, although they may seem to be clichés today, were original and perceptive in recording in fiction the mood of her era.⁵⁵ In his study The Mid-West Farm Novel, Meyers records the rise and fall of interest in farm fiction between 1891 and 1940, and suggests that the peak, between 1920 and 1949, can be accounted for by the new leisure of the retired farmers who had moved to the city following the closing of the frontier after 1890. By the 1940's the interest is wanting, for the new generations of the retired have been raised in urban environments, and the Second World War and its problems provided a new focus for literary interest.⁵⁶ This hypothesis, which incidentally accounts for the interest of Hamlin Garland, Sinclair Lewis, and Cather herself in the rural order, also explains the tone of nostalgia typical of the genre, and the paradoxical note of resentment or indignation evident in Garland's A Son of the Middle Border and Lewis' Main Street, as well as Cather's early short stories and sections of My Ántonia and The Song

of the Lark.

The source of this idealization of farm-life seems to be the Romantic belief that life in the country is superior, both biologically and spiritually, to life in town. The myth of the American West as Eden in fact begins with Crèvecoeur who brought to America the ideals of eighteenth century Europe concerning the Land as the centre of life, based on the rediscovery of Vergil and Hesiod, as the economic source of national wealth and as the core of democracy, the farmer being the only true Republican.⁵⁸ In America, Crèvecoeur discovered the best example of a society devoted to the natural rights of men who could find true happiness and virtue through their daily contact with nature.⁵⁹ Thus America, and in particular the rural West, came to symbolize the Promised Land of Western society, an agricultural paradise of simplicity, virtue and happiness in contrast to the increasing industrialism and materialism of a commercial society. American literature reflects this view in its acceptance of the agricultural order as the true centre of American life, and its celebration of the theme which Smith describes as "fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labour in the earth, all centring about the heroic figure of the idealized frontier farmer armed with. . . the sacred plough."⁶⁰

But the concept of rural life as physically and psychologically superior to urban life has another source. In mediaeval Catholicism, the natural universe is an extension of God and reflects His order and benevolence, and this view is expressed clearly in Cather's Shadows on the Rock which records the moods of seventeenth century

France, transferred successfully to America. Here the Ursuline sisters readjust easily to a life in the new and alien wilderness of Quebec:

They had the same well-ordered universe about them; this all-important earth, created by God for a great purpose, the sun which He made to light it by day, the moon which He made to light it by night,--and the stars, made to beautify the vault of heaven like frescoes, and to be a clock and compass for man.⁶¹

This order is here Divine in origin, for in her late novels, Cather is reaching towards Catholicism for the sense of order and security which she is unable to find in the modern world; the earlier novels reflect the Romantic and Rousseauist concept of Nature itself as a form or order and benevolence, of purposiveness, power and harmony, as expressed in Wordsworth's phrase "Nature's holy plan."⁶² Here in this tradition, the life of the individual is ennobled through contact with nature, and the closer the contact, the greater the ennoblement.⁶³ In Cather's fiction, those who live closest to nature are the explorer, the pioneer, and the farmers who adapt themselves to the patterns of nature and depend upon its order for their subsistence. Although Cather does present the occasional pioneer--the unbelievable Pierre Charron, the wiry priest Joseph Vaillant, Tom Outland--the majority of her men of nature follow the agricultural pattern of life celebrated by the classical poets. They adapt themselves to a new and alien land and subdue it to man's control; they establish a community of human beings in the midst of nature and build up social patterns of life in accord with the patterns of nature.

This choice of agricultural life as a centre for fiction indicates Cather's yearning, like that of her predecessors the Romantics,

and her successors, the American writers of farm-fiction, for the regularity, the order, the serenity of a life based on natural and seasonal patterns in contrast to the hectic pace of the city, its sterility, its pre-occupation with change, its noise and rush and disorder. This yearning which is at the centre of her best agricultural fiction, eventually led her to the Southwest after the "sunset of the pioneer" in Nebraska:⁶⁴

There is something about the hard, swift efficiency of New York that is terrifying after a long immersion in the Southwest where nobody seemed, even in the thirties, to be driving to a fate or pushing to a goal. Everybody, Indians, Spanish, Americans, even Anglos, seemed then to live at the slow, grazing pace, the pace that Willa had loved from her Virginia childhood.⁶⁵

As early as 1903, Cather had glorified rural life in her Edenic description of the French countryside where all the people are happy with the simplest elements of life, where they are all songsters and poets as they carry out the simple routines of life, sheeptending, wine-making, courting:

Everyone of these stone farmhouses, stable and dwelling together, with the farmyard court between, is a sort of feudal manor. Usually three generations and many servants live there: the grandparents, the married son who has inherited the farm, his children, and the wagoners and shepherds. No farmer has a desire to be anything else, or to live in any better house than the one his father lived in, or to see a larger city than Arles. They keep carefully all their ancient festivals, the Noël and the feasts of their patron saints and name saints. They desire to live honourably and long, to marry their daughters well, and to have strong sons to succeed them, to avoid innovation and change, to drink their Muscat wine and eat their boiled snails and tomatoes fried in oil to the end.⁶⁶

In Barbizon, the town first admired by Rousseau and Millet, the people are careful to "leave intact the beauty that first drew them there."⁶⁷ The houses are still stucco, the gardens bright with flowers, poppies,

marigolds, the peach-trees growing along the walls. There are no golf links or tennis courts, no new villas or electric lights, few ploughs and many rakes and grindstones, two-wheeled carts and other old implements: "They have even heroically denied themselves any sewage system whatever, and the waste water from the kitchens and water tubs odourously along through the streets."⁶⁸ And of Monte Carlo she wrote:

I had a continual restless feeling that there was nothing at all real about Monte Carlo. . . . There is nothing at all produced or manufactured there, and no life at all that takes hold upon the soil or grapples with the old conditions set for a people.⁶⁹

An analysis of the imagery in Cather's novels, particularly the novels of agricultural life O Pioneers!, My Ántonia and "Neighbour Rosicky", indicates that rural patterns of life based on the alternation of winter and summer, day and night, light and darkness, hope and despair, are integral to her interpretation of life as they are to that of Thomas Hardy. The rural past she finds a more valid order of life than the urban present, as Edith Lewis comments:

She could make the modern age almost disappear, fade away and become ghostlike. . . . [In Virginia] it was as if she were able to turn back the visible landscape, with its gas stations, hot dog stands, macadam roads, and advertising signs, as one might turn back a rug, and underneath it one saw the living pattern of another civilization and way of life.⁷⁰

To replace these rural patterns of season and year by modern ones; the hot-dog stand, the gas station, the garage, would destroy not only her imagery but her very themes. The difficulty of conveying modern life in the form of symbols is noted by Lafarge in his essay, "The Future of Religious Symbolism --a Catholic View." Both art and liturgy, he remarks, originally drew their images from the roots of life, the

seasonal patterns of seedtime and harvest, from the crops and everyday natural and familiar objects which aroused an emotional response in the reader or participant. But modern life rhythms are those of the train and subway, of lunch hour and a forty-hour week, and these cannot be expressed in images.⁷¹ In the end Cather turns back to the past for her novels. One of Ours is her Jude the Obscure. While Jude is ruined as an artist and a humanitarian through the doctrines of society, Claude is not even able to find his art. The alienation of modern society from the old patterns of life has destroyed all value and all meaning. Like Jude, Claude must die, since there is no future for man. But while Jude dies aware that his illusion of Christminster has been illusion only, Claude dies with the illusion that he is saving America, the final irony. After The Professor's House, Cather rejects any effort to deal with modern society and turns back to the past, where the old ways of life prevail and Nature is central in determining order, and to Catholicism where man finds spiritual guidance and spiritual hope in the universal harmony of a congenial universe, ordered benevolently for the fulfillment of human beings.

But the genre of farm-fiction is based upon an ambiguous and dual interpretation of the frontier which lies at the basis of American history. The impact of the frontier upon the American character and its subsequent refinement, and the rebellion of the individual against the group, are the central themes of the genre which reflects the transition from wilderness to modern industrial society and is therefore necessarily tragic-comic as Milton suggests.⁷² The assumption that rural life brings happiness and virtue through the

closer contact with nature implies another assumption, that urban life is tainted and confines the freedom and individuality of man. The Western author, Milton points out, is not concerned with the political, economic or even the social responsibilities of humanity and its dramatic conflicts, but with the passing of a way of life which has been ennobled by the beauty and the goodness of the land and nature; thus it is primarily nostalgic in tone.⁷³ Yet the impulse which stimulates the conquest of the frontier in the first place is the cult of progress and of empire-building which advocates the settlement of the wilderness, the imposition of culture and society upon the savage and barbarous natives.⁷⁴ The conflict between these dual ideals, the preservation of Eden and the missionary impulse to bring culture to the raw and crude frontier is evident in fiction as early as James Fenimore Cooper, as Smith points out. In The Pioneers (1822) the natural laws of the hunter and individual conflict with society and the laws of property and institutionalism. While here society is vindicated, in The Prairie (1824) the conflict is resolved on the side of the individual, of "untouched nature as a source of strength, truth and virtue" as opposed to a corrupted civilization.⁷⁵ From this point on, Cooper looks to the past and romance for his materials and in his heroic figure "Deerslayer" or "Pathfinder", the transfigured Natty Bumppo, he evokes one of the first expressions of nostalgia for the passing American frontier.

The ambiguity or tension in Cather's works is then an accurate reflection of the mood of the times: the unrealistic conflict between the ideal of a life close to the soil and thus emotionally complete,

and the practical judgement of the farm and small-town atmosphere of the West as stifling and culturally deprived, an atmosphere from which its youth, in particular its artists, must escape if they are to save their cultural soul.⁷⁶ Cather's early short stories reflect the negative elements of rural life almost unequivocally and even O Pioneers!, the first important work to evoke the positive aspects of the lost frontier, balances its nostalgia with the recognition that, whatever the Eden-like quality of life in the midst of uncontaminated Nature, the life of the small and stereotyped villages is better lost. But although Cather rejects the naive social and political optimism of the early decades of the twentieth century, she cannot reject the more subtle form of the Expansionist Doctrine of the nineteenth century.

So the very act of cultivation and taming of the prairie which makes of Alexandra a heroine where her father has been a failure, is also the act of transformation of the Wild Land to Society rejected by Crazy Ivar, and the novel ends in reminiscence and nostalgia.⁷⁷ This nostalgia becomes the predominant tone not only of My Ántonia and A Lost Lady but of The Professor's House and even Death Comes for the Archbishop which ought to exult in salvation through Catholicism rather than lament a lost wilderness. While Cather exploits the resulting tensions of these two views, and this conflict has much to do with the transformation of her fiction from a minor to a major literary expression, it is flawed by Cather's failure to recognize her dilemma. One cannot build without destroying in its

place, and Alexandra cannot both tame the prairie and preserve it in its original wildness.

In the end, Cather fails to recognize that the seeds of its failure are in the creative act itself and not imposed from without by a materialist society. Alexandra's conquest of the land is without value if she fails to domesticate the wilderness; Tom Outland's vacuum serves no purpose until it is utilized by Louis Marcellus and its value as a scientific invention is dependent upon its technological application. If Cather chooses to preserve rather than progress, if she prefers stasis to change. (and her later novels indicate that she does), heroism must logically lie in failure, Alexandra's failure to conquer the land or Tom's failure to discover a useful principle. Cather thus successfully presents and dramatizes the effects of these tensions upon her characters—Alexandra, Jim Burden, the Professor, the Archbishop—but fails in her inability to recognize that their nostalgia, though human, is inconsistent, and impossible as a mature and formulated philosophy of life.

Finally, Cather's choice, in her early novels, of the farmer as central figure introduces a problem common to the genre of farm-fiction: the discrepancy between the class and education of the writer and his central character. Meyers notes that it is not really solved until later in the twentieth century; perhaps it is not until the writers themselves are no longer of the upper and middle classes that the presentation in fiction of the lower classes becomes vivid and real. Before this, the actual role of the farmer has frequently been minor, and the novel primarily concerned with those

of a quite different social class.⁷⁸

Part of the problem lies in the tradition of the novel, inherited from Europe, which chose its central characters from the upper levels of society, the nobility or professional middle class strata, in sharp contrast to the realities of a farmer democracy.⁷⁹ Thus Smith notes that Cooper followed the precedent of Scott, introducing two levels of characters, the gentle nobility, the Judge, the doctor, the banker, and the realistic country people. His heroes and heroines are aristocratic, not only in nature but in social position, although they may be in disguise, and the elevated plane of the romance with its gentility of dialogue and description contrasts vividly with the realism of the peasant characters, Natty Bumppo and Ishmael Bush.⁸⁰

In Cather these two levels of characterization are still apparent, and we are always aware of the intervening consciousness of the author or narrator interpreting and selecting for us. In O Pioneers! and One of Ours, Alexandra and Claude are seen only externally by the omniscient author while in My Ántonia, Ántonia is observed only through the eyes of the sophisticated Jim Burden, returned from his city background to idealize his country past and his childhood sweetheart. We never come really to know those characters who are not author-surrogates and as a result, we see the country-people who are, on the whole, minor figures, in the manner of Forster's "flats".⁸¹ Like Wordsworth's leech-gatherer, Cather's simple peasant folk, whether French, Bohemian or Mid-Western, Mexican or Indian, exist largely in the imagination of the author,⁸² and her admiration for the simplicity and order of village life and the agricultural pattern

of life evades the complexity of fact. Face to face with simple peasant conditions, Cather is more truthful, as in her description of her train journey in 1903 in In Europe:

Those women of the soil are all very well in pictures by Millet or Bastien-Lepage, but they are not the most desirable travelling companions in a little compartment on a burning August day, when the mistral is blowing and white dust hangs heavy on the olive and fig trees. The baby had not much more clothing on than an infant Bacchus, and its mother was so tired and hot and discouraged with life that she threw the infant upon me. . . . [A German girl next us] looked very much like a fat pink pig that has been playing in the mud. She wore a heavy stuff dress, and she had not bathed for many years. . . . Promptly at one o'clock she took from this [port-monnaie] a fat bologna sausage, a lump of black bread, and a bit of cheese that may have been fresh when she left her dear Deutschland a week before. After she had devoured the last of the cheese our troubles were somewhat easier to bear. After all, no troubles of that sort could be really unbearable, with the Rhone just outside your car window, the Cevennes on one side of you and the Alps on the other.⁸³

Amusingly satiric as this passage is, it presents a side of the peasant class which Cather evidently observed but which we never really see in Cather's fiction, not even in the Shimerdas, the low-class Mexicans or the primitive Indians which the Archbishop encounters. The final sentence that nature can alleviate even such human trials as these suggests Cather's use of the country as an escape from city life and close contact with other human beings; she reflects Morris' statement that a prevailing American tendency is the need "to withdraw from everything complex into everything simple."⁸⁴ For Cather finds in her peasant characters the ideal rural life which she seeks, with no unpleasant and jarring aspects. What she has seen in the rural French peoples of Arles and Provence, Jim sees in *Ántonia*: no struggle, no pain, no suffering, no diseased crops or quarrelling children. Although we are told that *Ántonia*, like Rosicky, has suffered in the

past, her present, like Rosicky's, is serene and undisturbed. As Mrs. Kohler in The Song of the Lark retreats to her garden in times of stress,⁸⁵ so Cather retreats to an idealized nature in harmony with man, to the idyllic life of farm-fiction.

Nature: The Heroic Challenge

[Of Walnut Canyon] Willa's lyrical gift of speech brought me the burning sun of Arizona; the cry of the cicada in the great silence of a cliff city; the aromatic odor of yellow flowers growing in rocky crevices. Willa said that nobody could just "sit and look" in such a place--the rock walls challenged one to climb and one might end by hanging on by one's finger-tips, measuring oneself with that ancient image, Death, which so easily overpowered a white man in this environment.⁸⁶

Cather's heroic pioneer challenges the forces of nature and the forces of Death for his existence. The measure of his success is the mark which he makes upon nature; eventually he either subdues it to his purposes like Alexandra Bergson and Joseph Vaillant, or he enlarges his horizons in an effort to conquer and his failure too is a triumph, like the priests of the wilderness in Shadows on the Rock. In Walnut Canyon the exposure to the rock walls of the ancient cliff cities inspires in Cather the yearning to conquer the physical forces of the universe as the Pueblo Indians had done, creating their civilization in the face of extinction by nature or their enemies. The pioneer, then, symbolizes the figure of man in opposition to his natural environment, gaining heroism like Prometheus from his assertion of human qualities and needs in the face of the powers of earth and heaven.

Cather's emphasis on the heroic nature of the pioneer is not unique in American literature. Clough remarks that the Western novel

stresses endurance and toughness in its heroes. It tests the effects of nature on man's fortitude and endurance through its choice of locale, its use of names such as Cactus Flats and Rattlesnake Flats, its stress on the question "Can he really take it?", its testing of the resources of man's nature, his endurance, his action in time of danger, his swift decisiveness:

If it was not Indian, it was grizzly bear, or drouth, or sandstorm, or prairie fire, or waterless plains and treeless horizons, or blizzard, or plain misery and starvation. . . . There was no time for book morality or metaphysical debate.⁸⁷

The overall image of the West is the image of solitude, taciturnity, endurance of a difficult lot in life:

Above all, it is the image and the code of resistance--resistance to weather and space and man's absorption into impersonal institutions, to his exploitation by land jobbers, land sharks, land laws, large land-owners, mining companies. . . .⁸⁸

This whole ideal of resistance to the forces of the physical universe, of endurance through trouble and sorrow and near-death is epitomized in the description of Father Joseph Vaillant, narrated at a distance and not dramatised in the novel, as:

The wiry little priest whose life was to be a succession of mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers, who was to carry the Cross into territories yet unknown and unnamed, who would wear down mules and horses and scouts and stage-drivers.⁸⁹

Again:

Creede, Durange, Silver City, Central City, over the Continental Divide into Utah--his strange Episcopal Carriage was known throughout that rugged granite world. . . . He wore out driver after driver, and his coach was repaired so often and so extensively that before he abandoned it there was none of the original structure left. Broken tongues and singletrees, smashed wheels and splintered axles he considered trifling matters. Twice the old carriage itself slipped off the mountain road and rolled down the gorge, with the priest inside.⁹⁰

The qualities which Cather admires in the pioneer, (and again in the artist and saint) are qualities which have become synonymous generally with the life of the frontier. In This Necessary Earth, Clough observes:

The frontier, in the mind of America, is on its way to becoming the natural symbol for resolution, courage, the confrontation of hard realities from which there is no convenient escape, the courage of the individual fighter who can rely on none other for his salvation.⁹¹

To these qualities we may add those noted by Hicks in "The Development of Civilization": a belief in individual freedom (not always recognized as inconsistent with an insistence on democracy), a love of conquest, an optimistic outlook on life, and a willingness to accept innovations.⁹² Emerson Hough, in his essay lamenting the passing of the frontier, indicates a similar understanding of pioneer qualities:

The frontier was the place and the time of the strong man, of the self-sufficient but restless individual. It was the home of the rebel, the protestant, the unreconciled, the intolerant, the ardent--and the resolute. . . sometimes illiterate, oftentimes uncultured, the man of coarse garb and rude weapon. But the frontiersmen were the true dreamers of the nation. They really were the possessors of a national vision.⁹³

Self-sufficiency, rebellion against society, intolerance of social or moral evil, ardour, resolution: all these we find in Cather's heroes of the frontier, and they all possess a dream or vision of America. The chief difference between Hough and Cather is in realism. Hough recognizes that the pioneer combines with these qualities a cultural roughness, a crudity of dress and manners and education which Cather will not concede. Although he affirms that the frontiersmen are the true dreamers of the world, he does not imply that restlessness,

rebellion, intolerance, even ardour are sufficient in themselves, or even necessarily good. In Cather's early novels, her heroic men of nature are not idealized to the extent that they are unbelievable, although Cather does select her material so that neither Alexandra nor Antonia are presented from more than one angle, or are made entirely real. Alexandra certainly embodies the qualities of self-sufficiency, rejection of the mores of society, ardour and resolution, but Antonia is heroic in a more passive manner, ennobled like the leech-gatherer largely through her spirit of endurance and optimism. As Alexandra challenges nature and society directly, through her perseverance to her ideals, Antonia challenges it only indirectly, through her resistance in the face of evil, suffering and cruelty.

But in her later novels, Cather attempts to idealize her heroic men of nature until they are symbols rather than human beings; members of a romantic natural aristocracy. In The Song of the Lark and My Antonia, the secondary characters Ray Kennedy and Otto and Jake already shows signs of sentimentalization, and to the same school belong Roddy Blake in The Professor's House, Kit Carson of Death Comes for the Archbishop and Pierre Charron of Shadows on the Rock. The description of Kit Carson typifies all these: he is refined in features, gentle in expression, with lips "delicately modelled" and a soft Southern voice. Although illiterate, he has "a quick and discriminating intelligence" and "a clean sense of honour and a compassionate heart".⁹⁴ His treatment of women is charming and gentlemanly and "one felt in him standards, loyalties, a code which is not easily put into words but which is instantly

felt".⁹⁵

The major figures in these novels also reveal these qualities of heroic endurance, determination and individuality, combined with taste, refinement and all the benefits of culture. Captain Forrester in A Lost Lady is characterized indirectly largely through his treatment of Marian and the comments of Neil Herbert, the narrator, but he is clearly intended to bear the weight of a heroic interpretation not only by Neil but by Cather herself, who believes with him that the West has been developed out of dreams like his, dreams of homesteaders, contractors, prospectors: "We dreamed the railroads across the mountains".⁹⁶ To her he represents the self-reliance, the industry, the absolute integrity, the vitality and endurance of the frontier, as Neil soliloquizes:

There would be nothing to come back to. He had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer. He had come upon it when already its glory was nearly spent. . . . This was the very end of the road-making West; the men who had put plains and mountains under the iron harness were old; some were poor, and even the successful ones were hunting for rest and a brief reprieve from death. It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back.⁹⁷

In truth, he represents more aptly Hazard's claim that the frontier is related ultimately to business interests in its emphasis on rampant individualism which retreats before a stratified society, its need for abundant natural resources, its philosophy of pragmatism which accepts no checks from tradition, class or government, and its promise of prosperity to all.⁹⁸ Geismar suggests that Forrester and the empire-builders are not as much exploiters and adventurers as Ivy Peters, and remarks: "A Lost Lady" reflects a curious 'sunset of the pioneer'--a prismatic sunset, an almost mythical pioneer. . . [It is]

a touching fairy tale of the more beneficent robber barons, or their second or third cousins".⁹⁹

The Captain's cultural attributes are largely the result of his patronage of the comely life of manners and art as represented by his wife Marian. His successor, Cather's other great pioneer visionary the Archbishop, succeeds in his dream to integrate his vision of the frontier with the culture of Europe, to reconcile the two great opposites of American life, East and West, city and country.¹⁰⁰ But now he is a man of nature only by implication, through his associations with the heroic Vaillant who challenges the forces of nature and wins almost an immortality. Indeed we hardly believe in an endurance which is attributed to him but never demonstrated: "he had used to be abroad for weeks together on short rations, sleeping in the open, unable to keep his body clean".¹⁰¹ Clearly he is intended to portray the rugged man of nature but Cather's real interest now is in his culture and we are told at the beginning of the novel that he is "a man of gentle birth--brave, sensitive, courteous" with manners distinguished even in the desert.¹⁰² And in Shadows on the Rock, Auclair ceases to be a pioneer at all, except in that he is the first generation of his family to live in Quebec; he is a traditionalist and a cultural custodian and no longer a man of nature.

Figures like the Archbishop and the Captain can exist only in the past. In later years, after she had ceased writing, Cather expressed great admiration for the Sagas and Nordic novels of Sigrid Undset: "Here, too, was heroic man, pioneer man, exposed to untold

danger and peril and resisting and conquering it, creating a new spiritual world". But of Mrs. Undset's modern novels of Norway, Sergeant tells us: "She was not concerned with the present status of marriage in Norway--any more than with the divorces of the mid-Westerners. . . or with the poetry of T. S. Eliot".¹⁰³

It is the sunset of the pioneer, and there is no career for an Alexandra, a Captain Forrester or a Joseph Vaillant in the present. In her essay of 1923 "Nebraska, the End of the First Cycle" Cather wrote:

In Nebraska as in so many other states, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished, and that no new story worthy to take its place has yet begun. The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is still there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. They can look out over those broad stretches of fertility and say: "We made this with our backs and hands". The sons, the generation now in middle life, were reared amid hardships, and it is perhaps natural that they should be very much interested in material comfort, in buying whatever is expensive and ugly. Their fathers came into a wilderness and had to make everything, had to be as ingenious as shipwrecked sailors. The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything, wants to live and die in an automobile, scudding past those acres where the old men used to follow the long corn-rows up and down. They want to buy everything ready-made: clothes, food, education, music, pleasure. . . . "Surely the materialism and showy extravagance of this hour are a passing phase!"¹⁰⁴

Yet her hope for a future heroic age was gone by 1925. Tom Outland is the only modern pioneer and he too is extinct by 1922, dying with Claude Wheeler and all the potential heroes of society in the first World War. For the Professor himself, an existence like Tom's is no longer possible or perhaps even desirable. He takes no joy in the thought that he can return to the Southwest and he accepts the modern

world with resignation. While he comes finally to reject history as a source of consolation, Cather turns away from modern life to the old frontiers of the Southwest and Quebec where her pioneers can once more combine the endurance to challenge nature, the self-reliance and determination to conquer the frailness of the physical body, and the cultural sensitivity which she demands of her heroes, a sensitivity which may be denied by the crudeness and rawness of life on a new frontier but which she believes to be a shaping force in the life of her idealized heroes. Yet these final heroic pioneers who blend nature with art are, in some sense, only a refinement of Alexandra Bergson, challenging the land and bringing to birth out of the soil the civilization and culture which will make America, the American of 1922.

Nature as Escape

The Romantic poet turned to Nature as restorative, as a source of power in his struggle with life and society. Thus Wordsworth tells us that the daffodils bring wealth and pleasure to the mind in contemplation; the memory of Tintern Abbey and the Sylvan Wye convey spiritual strength in the midst of "the fretful stir/Unprofitable, and the fever of the world".¹⁰⁵ Keats returns to the world of society from the high ecstasy of the Nightingale's song where he has been "half in love with easeful Death" and comments: "the fancy cannot cheat so well/As she is famed to do, deceiving self".¹⁰⁶ The early American Romantics too turned to Nature chiefly as a restorative. Thoreau's experience in Walden is temporary:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.¹⁰⁷

He does not use nature as an escape from a society which has become unendurable: "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one".¹⁰⁸

But with the increase in mechanization, the transfer to the American Eden of the industrial civilization, Nature becomes a form of sanctuary, the last remnant of the Golden Age where the modern Adam is without sin in a natural and uncorrupted Paradise of earth and sky. In his critical work The Territory Ahead, Wright Morris observes that this use of nature as refuge or sanctuary has become a predominant feature of American literature since Thoreau. Cooper's Ishmael Bush is the first symbol of the romantic writer, a generic type, moving across the continent from east to west as the frontier closes up behind him and society encroaches upon the virgin wilderness, shaping it and defining it according to European ideals. And Cooper's novels become one of the first literary expressions of nostalgia for the passing American West before the destructive forces of civilization have defiled its virgin woods and crystal streams. Of modern American literature Morris says: "The best American fiction is still escape fiction--down the river on a raft, into the hills on a horse, or out of the world on a ship--the territory ahead lies behind us".¹⁰⁹ The nineteenth century writer retreated to the woods like Thoreau, the sea like Melville, the river like Mark Twain; the twentieth century

writer, he continues, escapes through nostalgia, rage or "some such ruling passion from which the idea of the present, the opposing idea, has been excluded".¹¹⁰ Thus the nostalgia for a lost past, in particular a mythic past close to nature and the real source of life, is implicit in the rejection of modern society.

After 1900, the country is no longer the normal and real habitat of the reader, and the new generation of writers Hemingway and Fitzgerald employ a different form of nostalgia. While Jay Gatsby comes out of the West, he is a product of a modern urban society, and his nostalgia is urban. Hemingway's Nick Adams searches in vain for a lost innocence in the Michigan woods, an innocence which never really existed, for violence, pain and suffering were as much a part of life there as in the trenches of the First World War, and the juxtaposition of the two underlines the irony of the Edenic myth. After 1920, the possibility of a return such as Jim Burden's is only a dream. Willie Loman escapes from the demands of a salesman society into the dream of Uncle Ben and his Alaskan gold, and Holden Caulfield, in a mental asylum, dreams of a cabin in the West, a job at a gas-pump, and complete withdrawal from all communication with a corrupted society as a deaf-mute. But while Willie dies with his dream, Holden Caulfield in the 1950's comes to accept that escape is not possible, that society must be adjusted to and faced. There is no more West, not even as a myth.

In the first phase of her fiction, Willa Cather uses nature as a source of energy or strength rather than as an escape. In O Pioneers!, she exults in the wild untamed nature of the land and in the pioneer

challenge of exerting control over it. Only towards the end does the note of nostalgia enter and then through Carl Lindstrum, the artist who has been defeated by this very Wild Land:

I even think I liked the old country better. This is all very splendid in its way, but there was something about this country when it was a wild old beast that has haunted me all these years. Now, when I come back to all this milk and honey, I feel like the old German song, "Wo bist du, wo bist du, mein geliebtest Land?"¹¹¹

Carl Lindstrum is one of the few Cather characters to escape successfully, rejecting the life of the artist in society to seek gold in Alaska, the last frontier. And through a mysterious process of regeneration, this uncorrupted Eden transforms the dry, pale ascetic into a pioneer figure, strong, stalwart and capable, worthy of the heroic figure of Alexandra. But already in My Ántonia, the note of nostalgia predominates, underlined by the sub-title, "optima dies. . . prima fugit". Jim's recognition of Antonia and the Land as the centre of his life represents the recognition of the artist that the source of his art lies in Nature. And in this most autobiographical of Cather's novels, Cather herself comes to terms for the first, and perhaps for the last time, with her own experience of the American west.

But Jim must return to society and to the sterility which is the product of an unsuccessful marriage, even to the shadowy business world from which he has emerged. For his associations with the land through Antonia and her children are necessarily spasmodic. Moreover, his experience of nature is not primary but vicarious, as it must of necessity be for Cather from this point on. Though these implications are subdued, even evaded, they are important in assessing Willa

Cather's later relationship to nature, which is no longer sufficient, alone and unaided, to provide a meaning for life. Yet while she turns to Art and then to religion as in search of a centre of order, her rejection of the present and her opposing to this urban and mechanical society, her dedication to the simplicity and beauty of natural life remains implicit. Thus the ugliness of prairie life in One of Ours is a direct consequence of industrialism and materialism, and the two halves of A Lost Lady counterpoise the beauty of the pioneer vision which retains the freshness of nature, and the sordidness of a society which drains the marshes for profit.

The need to escape to nature for a meaning in life reasserts itself as theme in My Mortal Enemy, where Myra Henshawe enobles her life by dying like a Shakespearean hero on a headland above the Atlantic Ocean, and in The Professor's House where the Professor dreams first of being shipwrecked in youth, then of returning to the earth itself in a complete rejection of all forms of society:

He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. . . . Desire under all desires, Truth under all Truths.¹¹²

He turns back to a life without joy, to human society without meaning, even to religion without real faith, but Cather moves on to the South-West, seventeenth century Quebec and early Virginia, in accordance with Morris' statement of the literary "frontier theory": "If you happen to run out of it [the frontier] where you are, why then you move on to where it is waiting".¹¹³ Cather had already found in the South-West an antidote to civilization:

In this Rio Grande region the grandiose and historical scale of things seemed to forecast some great spiritual event--something like a Crusade, perhaps; something certainly that had nothing to do with the appalling mediocrity and vulgarity of the industrial civilization.¹¹⁴

Rejecting the Industrial Revolution as proper material for art, she turns from the raw, crude, uncultured America of the present to the safe, secure America of the past, the South-West, observing to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant her desire:

To quit industrial urbanity, to explore on horseback ancient America where primitive pioneering conditions still prevailed, and the overwhelming drama of nature still ruled men's minds and thoughts.¹¹⁵

As a place of work, too, Cather was seeking a closer relationship with nature. From the tent in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where she had drafted her manuscripts since My Ántonia, she moved to the island of Grand Manan in the Bay of Fundy where she wrote after 1925. As Sergeant comments: "she needed a further distance, something more primitive, more deeply lonely".¹¹⁶ The city had become increasingly a "desert".¹¹⁷

Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock indicate, in their relationship to nature, this sense of remoteness from the present, indeed from the actual conditions of living at all. While landscape plays an important role in Death Comes for the Archbishop, it functions largely as a set-piece of description in the manner of local-colour fiction. Suggesting the wide panorama of modern cinema against which the drama of human life is played out, it is unreal, remote. And in Shadows of the Rock, although the seasons pass and the novel is shaped more clearly on a seasonal pattern than in any

work since My Ántonia, the effect is unreal, romanticized and exotic rather than part of the pattern of living.

Only in "Neighbour Rosicky" does Cather return to the life of the immigrant on the plains of the American West, to the routines and excitements, the joys and sorrows and fears of human beings living close to the soil in a Nature which is now almost extinct. Yet "Neighbour Rosicky" reveals, more clearly than its early predecessors O Pioneers! and My Antonia, the basic nostalgia of Cather's dream of the West, her attempt to capture in fiction a fleeting era which perhaps never really existed except in the sophisticated imaginations of Cather and her contemporaries. For Cather's American West is anti-industrial, anti-mechanistic, a paradise for the weary and the hopeless not only of Europe but of New York and the Industrial East. It is an Eden without evil, suffering and pain: "What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the world without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings".¹¹⁸ And he comments to himself, "What an escape he had, had, to be sure"¹¹⁹--an escape from struggle and famine, from even seeing these things around him. An escape, in short, to the Land.

In this Nature-idyll, even Death is no longer negative, an opposite to life, but a closer merging with the forces of Nature. Jim dreams in My Ántonia among the pumpkins: "I did not want to be anything any more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge".¹²⁰ While Jim returns to life and Ántonia, Rosicky realizes this experience in full, as we see from Doctor Ed's

description of his grave:

Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met that sky. The horses worked here in summer; the neighbours passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as winter came on. Nothing could be more undeathlike than this place. . . . Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful.¹²¹

Religion has failed to provide an answer to modern problems yet Nature prevails, even in Death. Cather's own escape from society to nature is real and final. On her grave in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, among the grasses and trees of the Old Cemetery, is the inscription from Jim's dream: "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great".¹²²

2. O PIONEERS!

Willa Cather's discovery in O Pioneers! of what was to become one of her major and most successful themes, was apparently as much of a surprise to herself as to her acquaintances. Her previous treatment of the Nebraska landscape was harsh and bitter, stressing the constant struggle of mankind against an alien nature which corrodes not only his life but his personality, even his human relationships, in the manner of Rolvaag's Giants of the Earth. Later in 1921, she explained in an interview to the Omaha World Herald:

I had searched for books telling about the beauty of the country I loved, its romance, the heroism and strength and courage of its people that had been plowed into the very furrows of its soil and I did not find them. And so I wrote O Pioneers!¹

In the same interview, she commented "This was the first time I walked off on my own feet--everything before was half real and half an imitation of writers whom I admired".²

This new choice of theme released in Cather an ability to handle her material and to develop her ideas in a new manner, even in a new structural form: To Sergeant's objection that the novel had no "sharp skeleton", she replied:

The land has no sculptured lines or features. The soil is soft, light, fluent, black, for the grass of the plains creates this type of soil as it decays. This influences the mind and memory of the author and so the composition of the story.³

And in defiance of critics and their rules of structure and composition, she declared:

Anyhow, she had done what she cared to do without concern for consequences or critics, submitted herself humbly to her own creative

impulse, dismissing all preconceived ideas as to what a novel "ought" to be. She had let the story run along at its own pace and length, without trimming it to pattern. The country insisted on being the Hero and she did not interfere, for the story came out of the long grasses, she felt, like Dvorák's New World Symphony. . . .⁴

These comments are intuitive rather than critical; they reveal how the author felt about her material rather than how she actually succeeded or failed in the process of writing.⁵ Nevertheless they indicate clearly that the centre of the novel is in the land and the order of nature, the position of man being almost subsidiary. The reference to the New World Symphony suggests the emotional tone of the novel and of the land which she describes later for us in The Song of the Lark:

This was music she [Thea] could understand, music from the New World indeed! . . . Here were the sand-hills, the grasshoppers and locusts, all the things that wakened and chirped in the early morning; the reaching and reaching of high plains, the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands. There was home in it, too; first memories, first mornings long ago; the amazement of a new soul in a new world; a soul new and yet old, that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall.⁶

It is the land itself which is active, heroic, encompassing the lives of all, and each character is revealed through his relationship with the land. Alexandra is heroic then insofar as she submerges her dreams with the land; apart from the land, she does not really exist. She is almost a mythical Earth-goddess who suffers and dies, only to be reborn again to a renewal in the land and the coming generation of young men, as the rather artificial conclusion makes explicit:

Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!" (309)⁷

The title O Pioneers! which Cather adapted from Walt Whitman's "Pioneers, O Pioneers!" is deceptive. For Whitman's poem celebrates

not only the New World as opposed to the Old, the conquest of the land and its ultimate submission, but the pioneers who have achieved this conquest, the sweating and toiling men who represent all of the human race, not merely the chosen visionaries whom Cather applauds. And the poem is more ecstatic, more masculine, more assertive, than Cather's more controlled prose:

Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there
beyond the seas?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountain steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing as we go the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

We primeval forest felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines
within,
We the surface brood surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!⁸

Whitman opens his arms to embrace all conditions of men, seamen and landmen, workmen, masters and slaves, the unhappy lovers, the prisoners, "all the joyous, all the sorrowing, all the living, all the dying", all forms and shows of the varied pageants of life.⁹ However Cather is not concerned with these truly democratic pioneers, but with the natural aristocrats, the chosen elite who possess heroic qualities of vision and imagination, perception and understanding. As Jessup notes in The Faith of Our Feminists:

Willa Cather does not write pioneer stories. Even the novel for

which she borrowed a title from Walt Whitman contains no sweat or labor of tillage. The concern of Miss Cather is not with man's struggle to claim a wilderness for civilization, but rather with woman's success or failure at maintaining effective domestic patterns in an alien land.¹⁰

She is dealing not with the world of labor and the march, but with the transplantation of that very past which Whitman has left behind. And in the end, even this transplantation fails. Alexandra has stated "both Emil and the country had become what she had hoped" (213). But Emil rejects the world of culture and art which Alexandra has worked for, and accepts instead the natural love of Marie and its consequence, death. And in the end, we are left alone with the land.

The structure of the novel has caused much discussion, for Cather combined two different themes which had already been developed as separate stories, "The White Mulberry Tree" and the story of Alexandra which ends with Alexandra's dream of the Corn-God. It is the interweaving of these two stories which results in the richness and variety of O Pioneers! for either story alone is thin and tenuous. The result is a greater variety of characters and interpretations of life that we find in the later, more strictly controlled novels.¹¹ The rather artificial relationship of Carl and Alexandra is counterpointed by the youthful ardour of Emil and Marie; the closeness of Alexandra and Emil by the conflict of Alexandra with Lou and Oscar. Alexandra's success in the land is balanced by her failure in initiating Emil to the world of culture apart from the plow; and the ecstasy of the young lovers is balanced by the suffering and despair of both Frank and Alexandra, both of whom are imprisoned through this love, one physically and the other mentally. The fates of the characters

are intertwined and each influences the others. None live independent lives in the manner of Jim Burden, the Professor, or the Archbishop who touch on the lives of those around but stand apart from involvement in life.

But the novel is tragic as well, for the characters never achieve a real understanding of each other. The marriage of Carl and Alexandra, criticized as an easy solution, is not really so, for like the ending of The Professor's House is solves nothing.¹² Emil is dead and buried; Alexandra is over forty and will have no children, and the sons and daughters of Lou and Oscar have not inherited the Bergson spirit and cannot truly inherit the land: "I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother's children" (308). The land belongs to the future. The order of Nature remains as the generations pass to make way for new generations, transcending individual suffering and pain, bringing peace and freedom. As Carl says of Alexandra: "You belong to the land. . . as you have always said. Now more than ever." (307)

Man and Nature: "The Wild Land" and the Humanization of Eden.

In O Pioneers! the Land itself is the main character of the novel and the central order of life, as Cather indicates in her comments to Elizabeth Sergeant: "The country insisted on being the Hero, and she did not interfere."¹³ In contrast to the impermanence of human life, the constant change, the cycle of life and death, the land remains a central fact in existence, a source of stability and security for those who may come into its inheritance. Man comes and

goes but Nature, like God, is eternal, and Alexandra returns from the constriction of life and society represented by Frank's imprisonment, to the peace and freedom of the land:

"The land belongs to the future, Carl; that's the way it seems to me. How many of the names on the county clerk's plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother's children. We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while". Carl looked at her wonderingly. She was still gazing into the west, and . . . the level rays of the sinking sun shone in her clear eyes. (307-8)

Each of the characters is defined by their relationship to nature. John Bergson believes essentially in the power of the Land; he has "the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable" (21), and Alexandra promises him on his deathbed "We will never lose the land" (26). Yet Bergson, like Anton Shimerda, is primarily an artist. He shares with the pioneer imaginative vision, but lacks his courage and his power of endurance, and he turns to death as an escape from the problems which the land brings: "He was quite willing to go deep under his fields and rest, where the plow could not find him. He was tired of making mistakes" (25). But also he misunderstands the land, and thus fails to impose control upon it:

This land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness, that runs wild and kicks things to pieces. He had an idea that no one understood how to farm it properly. (21-2)

And his fears are borne out after his death by three years of drouth and crop failure which has led the Divide to despair and the settlers to conclude "the country was never meant for men to live in" (47). Many leave for Iowa, Illinois or the town, among them Carl's parents,

and Alexandra alone realizes that this period of misfortune is really the prelude to success, "the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching ploughshare" (47).

But Nature itself changes during the novel from the wild, untameable masculine element of the opening section to the tamed and fertile prairie of "Neighbouring Fields". These two aspects are deliberately played off against one another in the early paragraphs of each section.¹⁴ In "The Wild Lands", this dominance of nature over man is accentuated by the choice of winter and night for chapter one and by the adjectives which assert the malignancy of nature to every trace of human existence:

Although it was only four o'clock, the winter day was fading. The road led southwest, toward the streak of pale watery light that glimmered in the leaden sky. . . . The little town behind them had vanished as if it had never been, had fallen behind the swell of the prairie, and the stern frozen country received them into its bosom. The homesteads were few and far apart; here and there a windmill gaunt against the sky, a sod house crouching in a hollow. But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its sombre wastes. It was from facing this vast hardness that the boy's mouth had become so bitter; because he felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness. (14-15)

The setting of winter, the fading light of evening, the choice of "leaden", "stern", "overwhelm", "fierce", "sombre" suggests the force of Nature, not as something inanimate but as animated, as deliberately malignant like Hardy's *heath*, controlling the destiny of the weak: "Mischance hung over it. Its Genius was unfriendly to man" (20). In the perspective of the universe, man is insignificant and temporal and the houses, separate and isolated, "crouch" into the land to

evade the seep of the wind and the rain:

Of all the bewildering things about a new country, the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening. The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them. Most of them were built of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form. The roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were scarcely noticeable. The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings. (19-20)

Nature looms over the puny existence of man, like the Mountain over the child Wordsworth, and human beings are dwarfed in size so that they become of no account. Even the struggle of past races has left a record so indefinite that it may not be human at all; man is annihilated by time and the elements, no longer the centre of the universe but merely a temporary phenomena, another form of the dust from which he was created and to which he will return.

This is the Land with which Alexandra must struggle and over which she must assert her control.¹⁵ The transformation of this land from an alien force, malignant and masculine with the attributes of a god or master, to the submissive feminine form with the attributes of a servant we do not observe; it is achieved in part by the change in season from winter to spring, in part by the gradual process of domestication which does convert the wasteland into a garden through human toil and sweat. The opening description of "Neighbouring Fields" makes this contrast explicit:

From the Norwegian graveyard one looks out over a vast checkerboard, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light. Telephone wires hum along the white roads, which always run at right angles. From the graveyard gate one can count a dozen gaily painted farmhouses; the gilded weather-

vanes on the big red barns wink at each other across the green and brown and yellow fields. . . . The Divide is now thickly populated. The rich soil yields heavy harvests; the dry, bracing climate and the smoothness of the land make labor easy for men and beasts. There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness. . . . There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the mood of the season, holding nothing back. Like the plains of Lombardy, it seems to rise a little to meet the sun. The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic, puissant quality that is in the tilth, the same strength and resoluteness. (76-7)

The sexual connotations of this passage bear out the change in perspective. Here man is dominant, masterful, and his dwellings are no longer dwarfed and insignificant, merged with the land, but magnified, in the foreground. The barns are large, the houses grouped more closely, and the brightly painted colours set them off against the greens and browns of the tilled fields.¹⁶ Alexandra attributes this transformation to the playfulness of nature which still controls its own destiny:

The land did it. It had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself, and it was so big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still. (116)

Ironically it is not Alexandra, who has achieved this transformation, but Carl who has been defeated by the Wild Land, by its stubbornness and its consecutive years of drought and crop failure, who expresses for Cather the nostalgia which becomes a major theme of My Ántonia. Passing through Nebraska on his way to the new fron-

tier in Alaska, Carl looks around upon these fertile fields, these prosperous houses and barns, and observes:

I even think I liked the old country better. This is all very splendid in its way, but there was something about this country when it was a wild old beast that has haunted me all these years. Now, when I come back to all this milk and honey, I feel like the old German song, "Wo bist du, wo bist du, mein geliebtest Land?" (118)

Perhaps this is Cather's subconscious recognition that those who long for the past and the old days are the men who are defeated by the present. Even the first chapter draws this contrast between Alexandra and Carl; while she is looking with "anguished perplexity into the future", his eyes are sombre and dark, seeming "already to be looking into the past" (14). And Cather's basic acceptance of Carl's view is indicated, not only in her later novels where the later Carl Lindstrums become the central figures of the novel, the narrators Jim Burden and Neil Herbert, but also in the loss of force and vigour in the natural descriptions, in the tameness of the powers of nature as an opponent of man, and the shifting of emphasis to the human struggle and away from the land as a dominant character.¹⁷

But where the land becomes passive, Alexandra assumes the central position of the novel, becoming identified with its power and fertility as Cather indicates clearly, if not subtly, in the final paragraph: "Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the shining eyes of youth!" (309). The implication that Alexandra actually conceives and brings forth the produce of the land is made explicit in two separate passages. Her dream of the

mythic figure who bears strong associations with the Corn God is basically sexual:

She used to have an illusion of being lifted up bodily and carried lightly by some one very strong. It was a man, certainly, who carried her, but he was like no man she knew; he was much larger and stronger and swifter, and he carried her easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat. She never saw him, but, with eyes closed, she could feel that he was yellow like the sunlight, and there was the smell of ripe cornfields about him. She could feel him approach, bend over her and lift her, and then she could feel herself being carried swiftly off across the fields. . . . [He] took from her all her bodily weariness. (206-7)

This dream follows closely upon another passage describing the happiness which Alexandra finds on certain days when "she was close to the flat, fallow world about her, and felt, as it were, in her own body the joyous germination of the soil" (204).¹⁸ In combination, these two suggest that Alexandra is indeed Earth-mother and Corn-Goddess from whose body comes the fruitfulness of the land, particularly in context for they follow immediately after the description of Winter in Part III: "down under the frozen crusts, at the root of the trees, the secret of life was still safe, warm as the blood in one's heart" (202). The childless Alexandra thus becomes mother not only to the fertile produce of the land, but to the new generation of youth who will grow up to inherit her love and devotion to this land as the children of Lou and Oscar can never hope to do. Alexandra's success here is achieved through her understanding of the force of Nature and her identification with it. She submits herself to Nature, and in her ultimate submission, she conquers through Love:

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her

tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman. (65)

Alexandra is the first and truest of Cather's pioneer aristocrats.¹⁹ She has certain qualities in common with the artist, and the product of her art is the regulation or ordering of nature. Carl's observance that "I've been away engraving other men's pictures, and you've stayed at home and made your own" (116) suggests that Alexandra is, in fact, the greater creator of the two since her art is primary and not derivative, a reflection of a Aristotelian theory that art is the imitation of action and is therefore secondary to action itself.²⁰ She has insight, a quality she shares with all of Cather's chosen characters, whether they be artists or pioneers: "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (48). And she has courage to resist criticism and attack, to persist in the face of difficulty and apparent failure. Above all, she has a transcendentalist's appreciation for the order of nature, revealed not only in the pattern of the seasons and of the alternation of rich years and poor, but in the processes of the universe itself, the rotation of the earth around the sun, the regulation of the stars:²¹

Alexandra. . . [looked] at the stars which glittered so keenly through the frosty autumn air. She always loved to watch them, to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. . . . The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the

little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring. (70-1)

Through these combined qualities— insight and imagination, love and understanding, patience and courage—she succeeds in transferring this order from the larger elements of the universe to the unordered and uncontrolled prairie, in imposing order upon the diverse forms of nature, to create the unified harmony of farm and garden out of the wilderness:

A stranger, approaching it [the farm], could not help noticing the beauty and fruitfulness of the outlying fields. There was something individual about the great farm, a most unusual trimness and care for detail. . . . When you go out of the house into the flower garden, there you feel again the order and fine arrangement manifest all over the great farm; in the fencing and hedging, in the windbreaks and sheds, in the symmetrical pasture ponds, planted with scrub willows to give shade to the cattle in fly-time. There is even a white row of beehives in the orchard, under the walnut trees. You feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best. (83-4)

The central plot of O Pioneers! concerns the relationship of Alexandra to the land, and of Carl to Alexandra as earth-mother. The secondary plot, the love story of Emil and Marie which had appeared separately as "The White Mulberry Tree", is closely linked to the first through the character of Emil whose tragedy destroys the possibility of Alexandra's fulfillment apart from the land, and through its treatment of nature not in the form of land but in the form of human relationships.²² This link, which unites and integrates the two plots, is indicated clearly in the poem "Prairie Spring" which introduces the novel:

Evening and the flat land,
Rich and sombre and always silent;
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,

Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;
 The growing wheat, the growing weeds,
 The toiling horses, the tired men;
 The long empty roads,
 Sullen fires of sunset, fading,
 The eternal, unresponsive sky.
 Against all this, Youth,
 Flaming like the wild roses,
 Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,
 Flashing like a star out of the twilight;
 Youth with its insupportable sweetness,
 Its fierce necessity,
 Its sharp desire,
 Singing and singing,
 Out of the lips of silence,
 Out of the earthy dusk.

The poem juxtaposes the two themes of the novel, the land and youth, drawing them together through verbal contrast--"sweetness" against "harshness", "sullen" against "sharp", "toiling" against "singing" and "unresponsive" against "desire"--and through the use of natural metaphors to describe the intensity of love: the flame of the roses, the song of the larks, the flashing light of the star against the twilight. It suggests too the conclusion of the novel, for love and youth are doomed by its demand for man's total strength, by the coming of sunset and above all, by the alien aloofness of nature from the demands of youth in "the eternal, unresponsive sky".

While Alexandra comes to symbolize the maternal force of nature, its strength and endurance, Marie symbolizes its youth and vitality, its sensuous joy in existence, its openness to love. Marie's face is full of colour and vivacity, "rather like a poppy, round and brown, with rich colour in her cheeks and lips" (79) and her brown eyes are "slashed with yellow, the colour of sunflower honey, or of old amber", dancing like yellow bubbles in champagne (135-6). Almost a part of

her own orchard she identifies herself with the trees for which she has chosen the Lindstrum place, especially the white mulberry tree where she can watch "the gentle-tireless swelling of the wheat" and the white and yellow butterflies fluttering over the purple of the alfalfa: "I feel as if this tree knows everything I ever think of when I sit here. When I come back to it, I never have to remind it of anything" (153).

The progress of the love affair parallels the progress of the seasons in its rise and fall, its alternating periods of fullness and fallow. Emil and Marie first meet as children in mid-winter, in the early days of January as the year begins anew its cycle of life and fertility. They are re-introduced in spring, twenty-two years later, when Marie and her husband buy the Lindstrum farm which neighbours on Alexandra's land. The context of this meeting indicates the parallel between the sexual receptiveness of the land and the emotional readiness and intensity of the two young people:

There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the seasons, holding nothing back. . . . The air and the earth are curiously intermingled, as if one were the breath of the other. (76-7)

Yet they meet in the graveyard, where Alexandra has sent Emil to cut the grass, and thus from the beginning the presence of death overshadows their love.²⁵ In this setting of natural beauty and fertility, their love comes to fruition under the white mulberry tree where the bluegrass is thick and the wild roses flame against the bunch grass. Yet the tragedy of their situation is recognized by Emil who describes the difference between his love and Amédée's through the somewhat

forced analogy of Alexandra's seed corn:

From two ears that had grown side by side, the grains of one shot up joyfully into the light, projecting themselves into the future, and the grains from the other lay still in the earth and rotted; and nobody knew why. (164)

With the coming of winter, the two lovers separate, and nature enters a period of stasis:

Winter has settled down over the Divide again; the season in which Nature recuperates, in which she sinks to sleep between the fruitfulness of autumn and the passion of spring. The birds have gone. The teeming life that goes on down in the long grass is exterminated. . . . The ground is frozen so hard that it bruises the foot to walk in the roads or in the ploughed fields. It is like an iron country, and the spirit is oppressed by its rigor and melancholy. One could easily believe that in that dead landscape the germs of life and fruitfulness were extinct forever. (187-8).

The love affair too is dormant, yet it is kept alive by Emil's letters, nursed by Marie as she nurses her window-shelves of fuschias and geraniums which she moves near the fire on cold nights (191-2). And like the fields, it is ready to come to life in the spring. As Marie watches the orchard:

She seemed to feel the weight of all the snow that lay down there. The branches had become so hard that they wounded your hand if you but tried to break a twig. And yet, down under the frozen crusts, at the roots of the trees, the secret of life was still safe, warm as the blood in one's heart; and the spring would come again! (202).

And in the spring Emil returns. In anticipating the tragic consequences of their unlawful love, Marie explicitly parallels the pattern of man's life to the seasonal cycle:

The years seemed to stretch before her like the land; spring, summer, autumn, winter, spring; always the same patient fields, the patient little trees, the patient lives; always the same yearning, the same pulling at the chain-until the instinct to live had torn itself and bled and weakened for the last time, until the chain secured a dead woman. (248)

She considers suicide, but she feels the pregnant fullness of life and

its fulfilment through love, nursing her "treasure of pain": "She did not want to die. She wanted to live and dream--a hundred years, forever! . . . She felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it encircled and swelled with that image of gold" (251) Yet ironically the lovers choose immediate love and death, under the stimulation of the music of the Mass. And the consummation of their love takes place as the summer sun sets over the orchard:

Everywhere the grain stood ripe and the hot afternoon was full of the smell of the ripe wheat, like the smell of bread baking in an oven, The breath of the wheat and the sweet clover passed him like pleasant things in a dream. . . . When he reached the orchard the sun was hanging low over the wheatfield. Long fingers of light reached through the apple branches as through a net; the orchard was riddled and shot with gold; light was the reality, the trees were merely interferences that reflected and refracted light. (257-8)

When Ivar and Alexandra find the bodies of the lovers, shot by Marie's husband, the white mulberries on the ground are stained with blood and the bodies are covered with dew, yet the rising sun reveals on Marie's face "a look of ineffable content" (269) and the happiness of the lovers in their future reunion is suggested in the passage:

But the stained, slippery grass, the darkened mulberries, told only half the story. Above Marie and Emil, two white butterflies were fluttering in and out among the interlaced shadows; diving and soaring, now close together, now far apart; and in the long grass by the fence the last wild roses of the year opened their pink hearts to die. (270)

Here Cather approaches for the first time the theme that she will touch upon in My Ántonia and develop fully in "Neighbour Rosicky", the theme that man transcends death and through it, enters more fully into the realm of nature.

Thus the love story concludes in summer, although Alexandra must yet pass through an autumn of purgation and suffering before the final return of Carl in the spring. The deliberate structuring of the novel on the pattern of day and season links the themes of youth and the land, and also unifies the two love plots. Although O Pioneers! concludes in the spring, signifying a return to life for Alexandra through the love of Carl, it is also appropriately the evening of their life, and Alexandra faces into the red west as "the level rays of the sinking sun shone in her clear eyes" (308).

Yet while Cather's treatment of Nature in O Pioneers! is essentially positive, there is an element of social criticism developed more subtly in My Ántonia and "Neighbour Rosicky", in the theory that rural life is purer and less tainted than life in society.

Crazy Ivar, a secondary character, carries this theory to its logical conclusions, the rejection not only of society as a whole, but of human responsibility and any human actions which will defile the virgin face of Nature.²⁶ Like the Indians of Death Comes for the Archbishop he leaves no marks of his presence:

At one end of the pond was an earthen dam, planted with green willow bushes, and above it a door and a single window were set into the hillside. . . . Not a shed, not a corral, not a wall, not even a path broken in the curly grass. But for the piece of rusty stovepipe sticking up through the sod, you could have walked over the roof of Ivar's dwelling without dreaming that you were near a human habitation. Ivar had lived for three years in the clay bank, without defiling the face of nature any more than the coyote that had lived there before him had done.³⁶

Ivar's life is virtually a rejection of human needs and an exaltation of animal life. His home is a natural paradise for wild life and his ponds provide rest and water for the birds in their flight across the

continent. He believes that badgers are cleaner than human beings and prefers to live in a sod house, as close to nature, the broad sky, the grasses curling in the hot sun, the silence of the wilds broken only by the singing of larks, the hum of the locust or the drumming of quail: "He disliked the litter of human dwellings: the broken food, the bits of broken china, the old wash-boilers and tea-kettles thrown into the sunflower patch" (37). And in rejecting human society as symbolized by its waste products,²⁷ he devotes his life to caring for "God's creatures", the animals to whom he acts as veterinarian. When he loses his land and is taken to live with Alexandra, he prefers to live in the barn "near the horses and, as he says, further from temptations" (87), a preference which suggests Swift's Gulliver after his visit to the Houyhnhnms. Although his code is basically harmless and eccentric, Ivar is also used as a standard against which to measure those in the novel who break the laws of God and who kill his creatures. The main characters in the novel do not adhere to his rigid morality and his anti-social doctrines, yet there is no real affirmation of society to counter his views, and his preference for natural life to humanity is suggested as at least admirable if not worthy of strict application. And that he is not an isolated phenomena in Cather's fiction is indicated by her later treatment of the Indians of Death Comes for the Archbishop.²⁸

Crazy Ivar's rejection of society, although it is a form of form of extremism, is supported too by Carl's Lindstrum's choice of nature and the land. Since he is an artist by birth and potentialities, Carl's rejection of the city is an effectual rejection of art and

culture for the Western frontier, an idea which anticipates the thesis novel "Neighbour Rosicky" by many years, and which employs many similar arguments: the lack of natural roots, the loss of individuality for sameness and conformity, the meaninglessness of life and human relationships in "the lonely crowd":

Freedom so often means that one isn't needed anywhere. Here you are an individual, you have a background of your own, you would be missed. But off there in the cities, there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing. When one of us dies, they scarcely know where to bury him. . . . We have no house, no place, no people of our own. We live in the streets, in the parks, in the theatres. We sit in restaurants and concert halls and look about at the hundreds of our own kind and shudder. (122-3)

Only on the frontier are Carl's qualities of vision and imagination accepted. Alexandra counters his argument with a more realistic view of country life than the Utopian paradise which it appears to be to the sophisticated townsman:

We pay a high rent, too, though we pay differently. We grow hard and heavy here. We don't move lightly and easily as you do, and our minds get stiff. If the world were no wider than my corn-fields, if there were not something beside this, I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work. (123-4)

And the consequences of country life are revealed in Oscar who combines the worst characteristics of both parents, inheriting the peasant stolidity of his mother without her comfortable placidity, and her love of order which in him has become routine and itself a vice (55). Yet although Alexandra specifically rejects her land: "I'd rather have had your freedom than my land" (122), the novel as a whole counters this denial of nature and stresses its constancy and security in the midst of the change and suffering of man. Thus the end of O Pioneers! returns us to Nature as a bucolic Eden, even as a refuge

from the problems of life and love, in harmony with the later novels My Ántonia and "Neighbour Rosicky": "We come and go, but the land is always here" (308).

Man and Art: "to cope with the world" (213)

The theme of art is secondary to the order of nature in O Pioneers! and the novel in some sense anticipates the rejection of art in The Professor's House through Carl's return to the land and through Emil's choice of natural love and consequently death. In its conclusion, the novel reconciles man to the land, and the city and its cultural inheritance is rejected for the simpler idyllic life in harmony with nature. Nevertheless, Alexandra's two accomplishments in Part II of the novel represent the two major goals of the pioneer, the development of the land and the natural resources of America, and the subsequent development of culture and the human mind:

Both Emil and the country had become what she had hoped. Out of her father's children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plow, and who had a personality apart from the soil. And that, she reflected, was what she had worked for. She felt well satisfied with her life. (213).

And when Carl attacks the city, with its ultimate rootlessness, its lack of meaning, it is Alexandra who affirms the need of culture and a world beyond the farm: "And yet I would rather have Emil grow up like that than like his two brothers" (123).

While Emil is the central figure of the artist in O Pioneers!, his father John Bergson is the first explicit formulation in Cather's fiction of the pioneer aristocrat, and anticipates not only Anton Shimerda but, more truly, Bishop Latour and Auclair of her last novels.

Although his relationship to art is tenuous, it is sufficiently defined to link him, with certain other qualities, to the portraits of Cather's artists. Alexandra remembers that he had "a sweet tenor voice, and when he was a young man he loved to sing" (103) and she tells Emil that he would sing with the sailors down in the shipyards, and in a male chorus in Stockholm where the gentlemen dressed for a concert in long black coats and white ties (238). He has imagination and vision--"a pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (48)--and he has too the sensitivity and perception of the artist, as indicated by the crayon portrait of "a slender man of thirty-five, with soft hair curling about his high forehead, a drooping mustache, and wondering, sad eyes that looked forward into the distance, as if they already beheld the New World" (104). Like the Archbishop he bought an old walnut secretary for his log cabin, and his preoccupation on Sundays was to sit down in his white shirt to write letters home, in a fine hand like engraving (236).²⁹

Of his several children, Alexandra inherits his appreciation and love of the land, his foresight and vision, but the business sense of her grandfather Bergson counters her father's dreaminess and passivity and accounts for her success. It is Emil who inherits the artistic qualities, as indicated in Alexandra's comparison of their fine handwriting (326), in Emil's musical inclination (he plays the cornet at university, the guitar in Mexico), and in his essential character of dreaminess. He inherits too, Bergson's failure. He has little understanding of the land, and of Alexandra's success in

struggling with it to overcome and control it. As he cuts the grass in the graveyard:

He was not thinking about the tired pioneers over whom his blade glittered. The old wild country, the struggle in which his sister was destined to succeed while so many men broke their hearts and died, he can scarcely remember. That is all among the dim things of childhood and has been forgotten in the brighter pattern life weaves to-day. (78)

Yet his perception of his own problems and personality is acute, and his handsomeness is accentuated by "stormy gray eyes, deeply set under a serious brow" (77). This too Alexandra connects to his inheritance: "Underneath he is more Swedish than any of us. Sometimes he is so like father that he frightens me; he is so violent in his feelings like that" (117), adding "he has his sad times, like father".

Emil too has vision; his tragedy is that he has nowhere to realize this vision, and he fluctuates between studying law, and taking up more land in the sandhills (117). This tension, of the artist or the saint without a mission, is revealed in his conversation with Marie:

"Alexandra can run the farm all right, without me. I don't want to stand around and look on. I want to be doing something on my own account".

"That's so," Marie sighed. "There are so many, many things you can do. Almost anything you choose."

"And there are so many, many things I can't do." Emil echoed her tone sarcastically. "Sometimes I don't want to do anything at all, and sometimes I want to pull the four corners of the Divide together. . . . I get tired of seeing men and horses going up and down, up and down. (155-6)

This restlessness is partially the product of Emil's useless love for Marie, and his defiance of society and religion bears out his emotional conflict: "I can't pray to have the things I want. . . and I won't pray not to have them, not if I'm damned for it" (157). But it is

partially too the product of his situation, for like Claude he has no release for his artistic sensitivity in society. In actuality, Emil is Alexandra's heir; he represents the third generation of pioneers which is weaker, less vital, than his forerunners and which has replaced the pioneer strength and vision with shallower aims or with an empty purposelessness.³⁰

It is this restlessness, and lack of emotional control which brings Emil to sacrifice his future for his love of Marie. His death, although it has been criticized as violent and ^{melo}dramatic, is appropriate to Cather's current belief that artistic qualities consume themselves if they are not countered with practical qualities as in Thea. And the destruction of Emil brings Alexandra not only to the point where she rejects art and life itself as a prison (298) but to her final affirmation of the land as the only possible way of life "We come and go, but the land is always here" (308). Lou's daughter Millie does suggest her grandfather's love of music through her talents on the organ and the piano, and through her choice of his old book of Swedish songs (102-3). Yet in spite of Alexandra's remark "I have great hopes of Millie" (239), there is no real indication in the novel that she shares any of the important qualities of the artist, and she inherits the domestic nature of her grandmother rather than the artistic sensitiveness of John Bergson.³¹ Ultimately Alexandra concedes that none of the children are to be John Bergson's heirs: "I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother's children" (308). Art may fail but nature is constant and unchanging. In effect, then this is Cather's first rejection of art.

While the role of Carl Lindstrum in O Pioneers! is secondary, in My Ántonia he will appear as the central character, the narrator Jim Burden. The references to Carl as an artist are scattered and tenuous, never integrated into a pattern nor even repeated to indicate that Cather is conscious of Carl's important role.³² He leaves Nebraska with his parents to learn engraving with a German in Chicago (50), and though he later asserts he is an engraver and not a painter, Alexandra associates him with art, believing that he is going to Alaska to paint the "Indians because he has sent her water-colour sketches from Chicago (107). Marie too associates him with art, remembering him "always buying pencils and tubes of paint at the drugstore" and drawing birds and flowers for her on wrapping paper when she was visiting her uncle (138). Carl has the sensitivity of the artist, as indicated in Cather's description: "He was a thin, frail boy, with brooding dark eyes, very quiet in all his movements. There was a delicate pallor in his thin face, and his mouth was too sensitive for a boy's." (10) Even here, his "sombre eyes" seem "already to be looking into the past" (14), and his preference for the faraway, the exotic, is indicated by his glass slides of Hans Christian Anderson, Robinson Crusoe, hunting pictures from Germany and "funny pictures about cannibals" (17).

Carl's importance in the novel, although it is not readily apparent, exists in his relationship to Alexandra, who remarks when his parents are moving to the city: "it will take more courage to bear your going than everything that has happened before" (51) and "Now I shall have nobody but Emil" (54). Carl's rejection of art

and the city then affects Alexandra as well as Emil's death. He leaves his trade as engraver in opposition to the world of non-art:

Wood-engraving is the only thing I care about, and that had gone out before I began. Everything's cheap metalwork nowadays, touching up miserable photographs, forcing up poor drawings, and spoiling good ones. I'm absolutely sick of it all. (122)

Unbelievably, Carl turns to the frontier of Alaska where, Cather affirms, the qualities of the dreamer and the artist are not uncommon but accepted. "There are always dreamers on the frontier" (301). While experience in the city has left him basically the same, self-conscious and wary--"he seemed to shrink into himself as he used to do; to hold himself away from things, as if he were afraid of being hurt", and his face is still "intelligent, sensitive, unhappy" (115)--he returns from the frontier the successful business man, due to the insight and sensitiveness which have never been valued on the Divide. His return to the land is finally symbolized by his marriage to the earth-goddess Alexandra. Like Jim Burden, he represents the archetypal experience of the human race which begins in close union with the soil, moves through a phase of society and culture in the urbanized towns and cities, and finally rejects the coldness and loneliness, the deadness of cement and stone, for the warmth and security of the land.

Other forms of artistic experience and culture find little expression in this early novel of Cather's. Unlike *Antonia*, Alexandra does not express herself in domestic culture, but in the land (84). This domestic tradition, the imposing of order and culture upon the rawness of a new frontier, has been the self-imposed role of Alexandra's mother from whom she inherits the sense of orderliness and routine

which is part of her success in the fields:

For eleven years she [Mrs. Bergson] had worthily striven to maintain some semblance of household order amid conditions that made order very difficult. Habit was very strong with Mrs. Bergson, and her unremitting efforts to repeat the routine of her old life among new surroundings had done a great deal to keep the family from disintegrating morally. . . . Alexandra often said that if her mother were cast upon a desert island, she would thank God for her deliverance, make a garden, and find something to preserve. . . . She had never quite forgiven John Bergson for bringing her to the end of the earth; but, now that she was here, she wanted to be let alone to reconstruct her old life in so far as that was possible. She could still take comfort in the world if she had bacon in the cave, glass jars on the shelves, and sheets in the press. (30)

While Mrs. Bergson is the prototype of *Ántonia*, Madame Auclair and Cécile, transferring the culture of the Old World to the New and establishing it on this new frontier, Alexandra does not take an interest in domestic life, and keeps several servants to manage the household while she controls the business of the farm. She neither accepts the culture of the town, nor does she openly reject it, as Cather will do later in *My Ántonia*. While there is a passing reference to "Hanover women who did china-painting" (9)³³, there is no open contempt for their prostitution of art, and the passage which describes Alexandra's dining-room, where Alexandra and her brothers will quarrel over the definition of moral standards, is light and humorous:

The table was set for company in the dining-room, where highly varnished wood and coloured glass and useless pieces of china were conspicuous enough to satisfy the standards of the new prosperity. . . . She was willing to be governed by the general conviction that the more useless and utterly unusable objects were, the greater their virtue as ornament. That seemed reasonable enough. Since she liked plain things herself, it was all the more necessary to have jars and punch-bowls and candlesticks in the company rooms for people who did appreciate them. Her guests liked to see about them these reassuring emblems of prosperity. (97-8)

It is Marie rather than Alexandra who anticipates the domestic art of Antonia and Mrs. Rosicky, in her homely comforts, her pink geraniums on the table and fuschias blooming on the window-shelves, the hot fragrance of her baking, the little rolls of stewed apricots powdered with sugar and the coffee-cake with nuts and poppy-seed (191-4).

Alexandra boasts that the Bohemians "certainly know how to make more kinds of bread than any other people in the world" (194) and that Marie could make a dozen varieties of fancy bread. Here Mrs. Lee, the mother of Lou's wife, feels completely at home; here she can borrow patterns for her crocheting and wear her new apron of checked gingham with a hunting design which she has done in cross-stitch (190).

Elsewhere, the development of culture and aesthetic art, a central theme in later novels, is minimized, although these two are inter-related in the novel through their connection to the Catholic church. The preparations for the confirmation ceremony are predominantly aesthetic: the choir rehearses the mass of Rossini, the boys and girls bring flowers and the women decorate the altar. And in this service, Emil rejects the theological implications and dwells on the artistry of the choir's "Gloria" and of Raoul's "Ave Maria".³⁴ Through the association of Marie with the Virgin Mary, Emil is released from tension and longing into a transcendentalism in which he finds a union of art, nature and religion, inducing in him a new insight into the nature of life and love:

He seemed to emerge from the conflicting emotions which had been whirling him about and sucking him under. He felt as if a clear light broke upon his mind, and with it a conviction that good was, after all, stronger than evil, and that good was possible to men. He seemed to discover that there was a kind of rapture

in which he could live forever without faltering and without sin. . . . That rapture was for those who could feel it; for people who could not, it was non-existent. He coveted nothing that was Frank Shabata's. The spirit he had met in music was his own. Frank Shabata had never found it. (255)

Shaky as this passage may be philosophically, it does capture the mood of ecstasy which Cather's artists achieve, and which separates them from non-artists like Frank Shabata. This ecstasy has little connection with theology, or even explicitly with religion but is basically aesthetic. Yet it leads him not towards art, but back to nature, to the land and the consummation of natural love. That it also leads directly to death is incidental, for love transcends even death and the two lovers are immortalized and achieve permanence through their re-entry into the order of nature.

Man and Religion: "life is for the living" (251)

The role of religion in O Pioneers! is secondary, unless we accept as a definition of religion the broad sense of Stewart as taking "seriously the human predicament"³⁵. Indeed the emphasis of the novel is upon a natural religion which places love above law and the order of society, and which suggests that as life gives way to death, death gives way to a rebirth into the natural order.

In this early novel of Nature, the Catholic Church functions to support man's joy in human existence, and to emphasize life over death and love over sorrow and suffering. The little French church merges so closely with its natural setting that it seems almost a part of the landscape, introducing the culture of the lost mediaeval France to the New World setting of Nebraska:

The French Church, properly the Church of Sainte-Agnes, stood upon a hill. The high, narrow, red-brick building, with its tall steeple and steep roof, could be seen for miles across the wheat-fields, though the little town of Sainte-Agnes was completely hidden away at the foot of the hill. The church looked powerful and triumphant there on its eminence, so high above the rest of the landscape, with miles of warm colour lying at its feet, and by its position and setting, it reminded one of some of the churches built long ago in the wheatlands of middle France. (211)

For the French and Bohemians, the Catholic church is the centre not only of worship but of community life: the two fairs which take place on the Church grounds include wrestling and characters, costumes, auctions and dancing. It represents for Amédée not only the scene of his wedding and the christening of his son, but also the security he feels in religion in life and even in facing death:

[T]he red brick church which had played so large a part in Amédée's life, had been the scene of his most serious moments and of his happiest hours. He had played and wrestled and sung and courted under its shadow. Only three weeks ago he had proudly carried his baby there to be christened. They could not doubt that that invisible arm was still about Amédée; that through the church on earth he had passed to the church triumphant, the goal of the hopes and faith of so many hundred years. (252)

But though the Church provides solace in death, and comfort for those who mourn, its emphasis is equally upon life. The coinciding of Amédée's funeral with the spring confirmation ceremonies reveals the intertwining of the themes of life and death in the novel:

The Church has always held that life is for the living. On Saturday, while half the village of Sainte-Agnes was mourning for Amédée and preparing the funeral black for his burial on Monday, the other half was busy with white dresses and veils for the confirmation service to-morrow, when the bishop was to confirm a class of one hundred boys and girls. Father Duchesne divided his time between the living and the dead. (251)

The love of Emil and Marie is affected partially by the Church, for Marie's qualities are part of her Catholic inheritance,

her vivacity and gay manners as well as her passion and sincerity.³⁶

When Emil implies that he loves her in spite of her marriage to Frank, she replies, "I wish you were a Catholic. The Church helps people, indeed it does. I pray for you but that's not the same as if you prayed for yourself" (157). And in her unhappiness during Emil's absence, she finds solace and comfort in her faith: "She found more comfort in the Church that winter than ever before. It seemed to come closer to her, and to fill an emptiness that ached in her heart" (201-2). Nevertheless, she rejects in the end the Catholic mores of love and marriage for Emil's natural passion which has refused the formulas of the Catholic church: "I can't pray to have the things I want. . . and I won't pray not to have them, not if I'm damned for it" (157). Yet ironically, it is in the Ave Maria of the confirmation service that he finds his emotional release and the ecstasy inspired by the ritual of the Catholic church leads directly to the triumph of his love over the order of the church, society and the law, and the nature of love becomes clear to him: "[He felt] a conviction that good was, after all, stronger than evil, and that good was possible to men. He seemed to discover that there was a kind of rapture in which he could love forever without faltering and without sin" (255). And the love affair concludes with the death of the lovers in a somewhat misty transcendentalism which is a form of natural religion in contrast to the Catholic faith in the church triumphant (252):

Above Emil and Marie, two white butterflies from Frank's alfalfa-field were fluttering in and out among the interlacing shadows; diving and soaring, now close together, now far apart. (270)

The Protestant Church receives little treatment in O Pioneers! to parallel either the Protestantism of Jim Burden's grandfather in My Ántonia or the attack on the Church in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours. It does however suggest the coldness and sterility which the word connotes to Willa Cather in opposition to the life and vitality of the Catholic faith, in the brief descriptions of Signa's wedding ceremony and the following supper, which contrast effectively with the beauty and joyousness of Amédée's wedding:

Signa's wedding supper was over. The guests, and the tiresome little Norwegian preacher who had performed the marriage ceremony, were saying goodnight. (227)

Crazy Ivar, too, suggests the extremism of the Protestant church in his judgement on the lovers and on Frank's revenge: "Sin and death for the young ones! God have mercy upon us!" (271). Yet Cather through Alexandra shows a sympathy for Ivar and his eccentricities, particularly his rejection of man-made religions and his acceptance of an ascetic existence reading the Bible and controlling his strong but mysterious temptations of the flesh. Indeed Ivar's explanation of his barefoot state to indulge the body is not satirical, as we might expect, but sympathetic:

The hands, the tongue, the eyes, the heart, all the bodily desires we are commanded to subdue; but the feet are free members. I indulge them without harm to anyone, even to trampling in filth when my desires are low. They are quickly cleaned again. (278)

It is Ivar who feels that Alexandra's quest to Emil's grave will bring her comfort: "When the eyes of the flesh are shut, the eyes of the spirit are open" (277). And he understands her suffering although, like ~~extreme~~ Protestants, he does not believe that Emil is

in Heaven (281).

The last section of the novel concentrates on Alexandra's purgation, a type of spiritual death and rebirth which brings to her the true meaning of life and love. And this is the section of the novel which considers the human predicament seriously and attempts to approach it with pity and love. At first Alexandra blames Marie bitterly, for she has brought destruction through her love not only to Emil but to her uncle, Frank and herself:

Why, with her happy, affectionate nature, should she have brought destruction and sorrow to all who had loved her, even to poor old Joe Tovesky. . . ? Was there, then, something wrong in being warm-hearted and impulsive like that? Alexandra hated to think so. But there was Emil, in the Norwegian graveyard at home, and here was Frank Shabata. (296)

But gradually she comes to realize that the death of Emil has only revealed qualities which were already latent in those around him. Frank is imprisoned for murder, but the prison is only a physical symbol for the state of Frank's soul. He has always lived in prison for he cannot love; he destroys the artist because he cannot understand beauty and joy and thus he represents the common man who is imprisoned in his own nature. Alexandra's realization of his basic pathos is also her realization of her own, and her escape from the prison of the mind is an indication of her recognition of life and nature. This experience of love and death has been regenerative, for like the Professor, she passes through symbolic death, in the autumn rain and her return to the womb leads to a renewal of life:

Ivar, I think it has done me good to get cold clear through like this, once. I don't believe I shall suffer so much any more. When you get so near the dead, they seem more real than

the living. Worldly thoughts leave one. . . . After you once get cold clear through, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It seems to bring back feelings you had when you were a baby. It carries you back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them. Maybe it's like that with the dead. (281)³⁷

It is Carl who leads Alexandra to a complete forgiveness of Marie whose love was natural, "an acceleration of life" (305). And in her new knowledge, Alexandra returns to the land for peace and freedom: "I thought when I came out of that prison, where poor Frank is, that I should never feel free again. But I do here" (307).³⁸

So the novel ends where it begins, with the land and the sunset. Against it, the joys of youth are temporary and fleeting, like the roses and the song of the larks. And only the land remains, a central fact in human existence and a centre of permanence and stability, of order to which man may cling in the change and chaos of individual life:

"There is great peace here, Carl, and freedom." . . . Alexandra took a deep breath and looked off into the red west. . . . On every side the brown waves of the earth rolled away to meet the sky. . . . "We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while". Carl looked at her wonderingly. She was still gazing into the west, and in her face there was that exalted serenity that came to her in moments of deep feeling. The level rays of the sinking sun shone in her clear eyes. (307-8)

Yet nature has changed; it has been tamed and controlled to man's purposes. It has moved from winter through summer to spring and with it, Alexandra has moved from naivete' in human relationships to full understanding and acceptance of the sorrows of life. O Pioneers! is, in some senses, the most mature of Cather's novels

with the exception of The Professor's House for here she uncompromisingly faces her conflict and resolves it as far as an acceptance of age and death may be resolved.³⁹ In My Ántonia this suffering will be submerged, omitted from the actual narrative which concludes in a passage of idyllicism. Cather refines her technique, but the sense of reality, the "felt life"⁴⁰ she leaves behind with her first successful novel.

3. MY ÁNTONIA:

I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For Antonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny. . . . Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past. (371-2) ¹

O Pioneers! was, for Willa Cather, a new discovery, a revelation of her admiration and love for the vast, powerful country in which she had grown up and which seemed to hold man in its grip. Its structure is linear; the novel moves from the evocation of the wild and seemingly untamable prairie in Book I to the fertile, richly cultivated fields, the large farmhouses and barns of Book II. While Carl faces the past and laments "Wo bist du, wo bist du, mein geliebtest Land?",² Alexandra faces the future squarely, a future which effectually denies personal relations and affirms the security of the Land. My Ántonia, in contrast, is cyclical. It opens with the present of Jim Burden and the almost stifling fertility of the Nebraska landscape, and moves back to Jim's youth, to the open and uncultivated prairies and to Ántonia, in a mood which is clearly nostalgic. And while the tension between masculine dominance and feminine submission in nature is still present, the final section of Jim's return to Nebraska and to Antonia perpetuates only the second, the prairie as Garden.³

Again the Land and Nature play a central role in the novel. Thus Jim Burden's recognition that he has completed his quest, and

found in Nebraska and *Ántonia* the meaning of life, represents Cather's own recognition of her past as a source for her art; Jim becomes an author-surrogate who recapitulates Cather's return from the sophisticated culture of the East and Europe to the stability of and essential changelessness of the Nebraska countryside. And with him Jim takes his knowledge of the human past, of society and art, which enables him to assess his own personal past and *Ántonia*. In this process *Ántonia* is not so much a person as a symbol, of the whole pioneering experience, of the cultivation of the frontier by the amalgamation of New World freedom and Old World culture, and of the right relationship to Nature and to self which Jim seeks throughout the world and which he comes to recognize only in her.

The centre of the novel, then, is not *Ántonia* but 'My' *Ántonia*, as stated explicitly by Jim Burden in the Introduction,⁴ and this statement may clarify certain critical problems of the novel: the choice of male narrator; the view of *Ántonia*, at times close, at times distanced by a second narrator; the complete absence of *Ántonia* from the third section; and the predominant tone of nostalgia of Part V. In the Introduction, Jim explains to the "I" figure: "I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me" (Introd.). The original introduction, which Cather revised considerably in 1926, is clearer. Here Cather (the unidentified "I" of the later version) meets Jim Burden on a west-bound train and they agree to write all they remember of *Ántonia* in order to gain a complete picture of her, for, as Cather observes "To speak her name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain".⁵ When he

returns with the text, Jim explains "I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people *Ántonia's* name recalls to me".⁶ This statement which shifts the emphasis from *Ántonia* as person to *Ántonia* as the centre of Jim's experience of Nebraska, is implied but not directly stated in the revised introduction:

[Our] talk kept returning to a central figure, a Bohemian girl whom we had both known long ago. More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood. (Introd.)

The original introduction also suggests Cather's intention regarding structure; Jim indicates that his novel will lack the usual fictional form:

'Of course', he said, 'I should have to do it in a direct way, and say a great deal about myself. It's through myself that I knew and felt her, and I've no practice in any other form of presentation'.⁷

The structure of the novel, then, adopts a first-person technique, in which the narrator is not a distanced observer, a Jamesian reflector, but rather an active intelligence imposing form and order on the multiple experiences of life. This form is basically associative rather than logical, and *Ántonia* is essentially the agent which precipitates the artistic experience. The quest is circular; Jim finds his end in his beginnings, and thus Book V repeats the idea of Book I, although distanced by the intervention of time and romantically coloured by the operation of nostalgia.⁸

The pattern of Jim Burden's quest is underlined by the order of the Books and by explicit use of the journey-image. We first meet Jim on a west-bound train and observe the inception of the novel in

his mind "while the train flashed through never-ending miles of ripe wheat, by country towns and bright-flowered pastures and oak groves" (Introd.). The narrative proper too opens with Jim's morning journey into the country of Nebraska, "an interminable journey across the great midland plain of North America" (3). And his initiation into experience is connected explicitly with the pioneer's renewal of innocence, his beginning again in the New World: "Jake's experience of the world was not much wider than mine. He had never been in a railway train until that morning when we set out to try our fortunes in a new world" (3). This New World Jim finds in the American West, and Book I develops his experience of the vast and beautiful land, both in its untamed and masculine aspect, and in its more feminine and cultivated form as the Garden of the World. This experience Jim shares with the Bohemian girl, *Ántonia* Shimerda, who becomes for him a symbol of the Land and the promise of the pioneer. The second and third books mark Jim's movement away from nature, first to the small town of Black Hawk, midway between country and city, and then to the university town of Lincoln. But while in Book II *Ántonia* does move to Black Hawk, Book III, which presents the experience of Jim alone, has been criticized as irrelevant to a novel supposedly dealing with the life of *Ántonia*. Nevertheless it is an integral part of Jim's development and quest for self, the real theme of My Antonia. And it is linked with *Ántonia* through Lena Lingard her counterpart, who shares the same pioneering background as an immigrant on the land but who rejects the Land for the city and art. At the end of Book III Jim too rejects the Land. These

three phases of country, small town and city end one unit in the tale, and Jim's final move to Boston and the East cuts him off effectually from Ántonia and from the country for which she stands.

The last two books are removed by a detachment in time and perspective from the direct experience of the first three, and involve Jim's reassessment of his life.⁹ The first return in Book IV is only temporary, and the introduction of a second narrator to tell the story of Ántonia's betrayal indicates this detachment. Ántonia is becoming not a real person but a symbol, here of failure, and Jim is irritated with her because she has become "an object of pity" (298), an unmarried mother, while both Lena and Tiny have become symbols of success in the outside world. But in Book Five, twenty years later, Jim returns to Ántonia and the Land and recognizes that here he has found a centre of order which gives meaning to life. Although he will travel east by the night express, a journey which parallels his morning journey to the new world, he will return to Ántonia and her boys as a constant pole of stability in a world of change. Thus Jim's experience coincides not only with that of Cather herself, but with the experience of the American people, moving across the mountains to the newly opened west, to face the forces of uncontrolled nature, to control the prairie and make it fertile, and then returning from country to town, from town to the city, and finally to the east and Europe. Jim's return to the Land represents the new interest of America in its pioneers, in the "good old days" of the West and the predominance of nostalgia for the past.¹⁰ That this nostalgia is essentially unrealistic, a product of

a high level of urban sophistication, is indicated clearly in the idyllic quality of Book V, and the static nature of its perpetual summer in contrast to the realism and vitality of Book I.

Jim Burden's role in the novel is thus integral to its interpretation and structure. The deliberate choice of male narrator however raises certain problems, as Sarah Orne Jewett had warned Cather some years earlier.¹¹ Cather herself explained Antonia's relationship to Jim as that of a big sister, or a kind of earth mother "a symbol so central to Jim's heart that he cherished her within himself, and surrounded her figure with a gentle clarity like the early morning or sunset light on prairie and cornfields".¹² Intellectually unsatisfactory as this statement may be, it does suggest the mood of Jim (and of Cather) in approaching the heroine; it stresses both the mythic nature of Antonia's role and the sentimentality of man's emotions in connection with her, even her relationship to the land so that her person becomes almost indistinguishable from it. And it suggests too the angle of the portrait, first from the morning of youth, later from the years of middle age. Indeed Cather is correct in choosing a male narrator for her assessment of Antonia, even though it is clear that Jim represents herself and that his associative response to Antonia is in reality her own. For the experience is universalized as the American quest, and the balance of the novel is achieved between male and female, dominance and submission (although as in O Pioneers! it is the female who shows the more dominant nature).

As writer-participator, Jim has a dual role: he must be at once

subjective and objective, involved and standing apart. Thus he is attracted to Ántonia as only a male can be: "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart or a wife, or my mother or my sister--anything that a woman can be to a man. The idea of you is part of my mind." (321). Yet he must also remain detached, for involvement would destroy the balance of the narrative, and make of Ántonia an individual rather than a symbol.¹³ Cather essentially evades the problem, for Jim states his attraction at a moment when he is free and unattached, to an Ántonia betrayed by her fiancé and bringing up alone her illegitimate child. And he successfully escapes her eternalfeminine drive which later enslaves Cusack, and is free to find himself, first in Boston and later in Europe, to return to her in the end as a source of peace and stability.

This complex interrelation is at the centre of My Antonia, and to misunderstand its significance is to misinterpret not only the theme and viewpoint of the novel but even the structure and tone. My Antonia has been frequently acclaimed as the best of Cather's fiction, and even among the great achievements of American literature so that such a major critic as Wagenknecht can say that it is a "touchstone" for literary judgement, the taste for it indicating a taste for literature.¹⁴ Yet it has definite defects. These defects are not those commonly attributed to it: the defects of structure objected to even by E. K. Brown in the Peter-Pavel incident, or the inclusion of Book III into a work supposedly about Ántonia. They are not even primarily defects in the narrative sense or the choice of the narrator.¹⁵ They are essentially

defects in the vision of the author who is successful in creating through her narrator the everyday pattern of life in the country and small town of her childhood, but who fails in assessing this experience from the point of maturity. In the end, Cather returns not to the present but the past.

R. Gale aptly points out that My Ántonia ends with the word "past" and The Professor's House with "future" for ironically it is the former early work which bases its whole tone on the nostalgia of "optima dies" and the latter which attempts to face modern life, even though with resignation.¹⁶ While Martin claims in "The Drama of Memory in My Ántonia" that Jim "validates the nostalgia by giving his feeling for the past a meaning in the present,"¹⁷ that he is "reconciled to the present because of the enduring value of the past, even as he comes to possess that past anew because of the promise and vitality of the present,"¹⁸ he is more accurate when he remarks:

Amid Ántonia's large family Jim feels like a boy again--and this I feel measures the success of his final return--he does not wish that he were a boy again, as he did in Book IV. He has no more need to cling to the past, for the past has been transfigured like the autumn prairie of old.¹⁹

For this is exactly what happens in Book V although the success is questionable. In Book IV, Jim has said that he wishes Ántonia to be "anything that a woman can be to a man", such as a mother (320); in Book V she becomes just that.

Jim's final self-realization then is achieved at the cost of his adult life. While he does return to the city and his occupation as lawyer, nothing is made of this in any part of the book except the

preface and the clear indication of the structural order is that it is of little importance. My Ántonia then belongs to the category of nostalgic reminiscence for a lost past. In it the past is not made present but retained as a beautiful memory. That Ántonia remains unchanged for Jim indicates that he does not really see her apart from himself and his memory; he sees again only his image of her as Wordsworth sees in the Leechgatherer only what he is looking for.²⁰ Despite the successful evocation of the mood and tone of the prairies and prairie youth in Books One to Three, Cather never transcends the adolescent viewpoint of the inscription "Optima dies. . . prima fugit." And so, she is ready in her next novels to turn to the next obvious theme, the corruption of this lost west by a present industrial society. That it is gone, she sees. Why it is gone, she never really comes to know and in the next phase her novels concern only an attack on the present.

Man and Nature: "that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great" (18).

The relationship of My Ántonia to the order of Nature is indicated clearly in the inscription from Vergil, "Optima dies. . . prima fugit"; it not only suggests the nostalgic tone of the novel, but evokes too the atmosphere of rural Italy and Vergil's celebration in The Georgics of an agricultural Eden apart from the crowded streets of the City and society, from the struggle of everyday urban life and the pressures of art. The lament for a lost past is Cather's misinterpretation of the context of her lines: "Life's fairest days are the

first to flee for hapless mortals; on creep diseases and sad age, and suffering; and stern death's ruthlessness sweeps away its prey."²¹

In reality, this moralization follows a recommendation on cattle-breeding. Yet for Jim, as for Cather, it indicates a viewpoint from which to assess the meaning of life and experience, a starting-point for the quest which will move from the Land to the culture of town and city, and ultimately back again to the land and memories of youth.

The introduction to the novel is central, for it establishes the mood or tone of the novel, the relationship of man to nature, and the search in the Land for identity. Although it is set at a particular time in summer, the handling of language and metaphor embraces a total experience of the prairie in all its moods, summer and winter, fertility and barrenness, creativity and destruction:

Last summer, in a season of intense heat, Jim Burden and I happened to be crossing Iowa on the same train. . . . While the train flashed through never-ending miles of ripe wheat, by country towns and brightly-flowered pastures and oak groves wilting in the sun, we sat in the observation car where the woodwork was hot to the touch and red dust lay deep over everything. The dust and the heat, the burning wind, reminded us of many things. We were talking about what it is like to spend one's childhood in little towns like these, buried in wheat and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate; burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the colour and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and grey as sheet-iron. (Introd.)

In one passage, Cather presents the two poles of nature and life: juxtaposing the summer, heavy, drowsy and overwhelmingly fertile, the sun, the dust, the vegetation, and the winter, lonely, sterile and bare. The pairing of opposites through alliteration accentuates

the force of the contrast: "green" and "grey", "billowy" and "bare", harvests and snow, summer and winter, "buried" and "blustery", "stifled" and "stripped", vegetation and sheet-iron. As well, the choice of "buried" and "stifled" to describe the overwhelming fertility of the land merges the ideas of life and death, so that these words which usually connote death are modified by the context to convey a picture of life so vital that it becomes almost oppressive, even threatening.

As in O Pioneers! these two aspects of nature, the masculine and the feminine, are developed early in the novel, here in Book I. To the child on the train, fresh from Virginia, only the masculine aspect is evident, and the prairie expands to embrace the whole of existence, blotting out any other possibilities: "The only thing very noticeable about Nebraska was that it was still, all day long, Nebraska" (5):

There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. . . . I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction. . . . This was the complete dome of heaven, all there was of it. I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up there. . . . If we never arrived anywhere, it did not matter. Between that earth and sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night. (7-8)

Nature is vast and alien, separated in time and space from society and the past. The child Jim faces essentially the problem of the pioneer: to take this world of nature, unpopulated by man, and to shape it to his needs and desires, to establish a society, a culture, even a religion in a hostile universe. Yet this new, raw universe

is also challenging in a way which the ploughed and fertile fields are not, and the young Jim learns early the ecstasy of untamed nature, an ecstasy of primary experience similar in intensity to man's response to the universal symbols of sea and sky:

Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but rough, shaggy, red, grass, most of it as tall as I. . . . I felt that the grass was the country as the water is the sea. The red of the grass made all the great prairie the colour of wine-stains, or of certain sea-weeds when they are first washed up. . . . I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping, . . . I wanted to walk straight on through the red grass and over the edge of the world, which could not be very far away. (14-16)

Although on the open prairie, as in Book I of O Pioneers!, the landmarks of man seem at times futile, the road merging with "the gentle swell of unbroken prairie to the west" and the box-elder hedges "insignificant against the grass" (14-15), the contrary aspect of nature is presented directly in Book I through the Burden farm. The white frame house of one and a half stories is surrounded by its barns and granaries, its pig-yards and corncribs, and beyond, the cornfield and the sorghum patch. And in the fertility of the Burden garden, Jim finds the perfect consummation of man's relationship to nature, the fulfilling of all desire. Leaning against the warm yellow pumpkins, eating the ground-cherries and watching the gophers and giant grasshoppers, Jim feels the earth warm around, the wind humming in the grasses above his head:

Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we

die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness: to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep. (18)

In the end, then, a complete merging with nature and life is a merging with its opposite, death, and the fulfillment of life lies in perfect peace, the freedom from seeking. Thus Jim finds in Nature, in the form of the garden,¹⁸ perfect security which Thea finds in the Canyon, and the Pueblo Indians of Death Comes for the Archbishop in their rock, a refuge from change and mutability, even from life itself.

The whole structure of My Ántonia is related to the cycle of nature and man's life in nature.²² The incidents of Book I, and to a lesser extent, Book II are connected through the pattern of the seasons and of birth and death. In these books, both the destructive and the creative forces of nature are concurrently present. Even in the garden, the snakes lurk among the bushes, the hawks sail overhead and the gophers prey upon the chickens. It is only in Book IV and V that we see perpetual summer, perpetual fertility and fulfillment, and the lack of balance accounts for the nostalgic and somewhat unreal tone of the last book in particular.

While Book I opens in the fullness of summer, the "first glorious autumn" is close behind, and the mellow afternoons with their amber sunlight belie the ice on the pond in the mornings and the "shiver of coming winter in the air" (38). The conjunction in autumn of life and death, preservation and destruction, is conveyed in the figures of Ántonia and Anton Shimerda. While Ántonia is young and vital, her eyes

full of light "like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood" (23), Mr. Shimerda has "a wintry flicker of a smile" (41) and his face is as pale as ashes "like something from which the warmth and light had died out" (24).²³ Antonia preserves the life of the last little grasshopper, tying him under her kerchief, while Mr. Shimerda carries the symbols of death, a gun and three dead rabbits. The setting sun against the burning prairie suggests the imminent approach of winter and a period of purgation for the two young people before the return of life in the spring:

As far as we could see, the miles of copper-red grass were drenched in sunlight that was stronger and fiercer than at any other time of the day. The blond cornfields were red gold, the haystacks turned rosy and threw long shadows. The whole prairie was like the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed. That hour always had the exultation of victory, of triumphant ending, like a hero's death--heroes who died young and gloriously. It was a sudden transfiguration, a lifting-up of day. (40)

But while the moment seems timeless, a poising on the verge of death, time is always present in the "two long black shadows [which] flitted before us or followed after, two dark spots on the ruddy grass" (40). Even in this world of heroism, there is evil, in the form of the snake which Jim kills, and which suggests "the ancient, eldest Evil" (47), existing even in the Edenic New World before the coming of the white man. Although the dragon-slaying episode of the snake turns out to be a mock-romance, the phallic overtones of the description (45) suggest that the evil is specifically sexual, and prepare for the later seduction of Antonia from which Jim cannot, or does not choose, to save her. Yet the snake incident is related

also to the other forces of destruction in the natural and human worlds, the wolves which howl in the cold nights, the tales of Otto and Jake of hardships and death, the story of Peter and Pavel, and the victimization of Mr. Shimerda by Krajeck leading directly to the suicide of Antonia's father.²⁴

The coming of winter changes the world around Jim. The red grasses of the prairie are covered with snow, and the cycle of life centres around the primary needs of man to preserve that life:

Next to getting warm and keeping warm, dinner and supper were the most important things we had to think about. Our lives centred around warmth and food and the return of the men at nightfall. (66)

During the day, the effect of winter is stimulating, exhilarating and its destructive force is submerged in its vitality:

The sky was brilliantly blue, and the sunlight on the glittering white stretches of prairie was almost blinding. . . . The few little cedars, which were so dull and dingy before, now stood out a strong, dusky green. The wind had the burning taste of fresh snow. . . . All about us the snow was crusted in shallow terraces, with tracings like ripple-marks at the edges, curly waves that were the actual impression of the stinging lash in the wind. (63-4)

But with night, Nature is more menacing, the east wind begins to howl and the sky becomes sombre as the sun's power weakens (65). The destructive power of nature is paralleled by the destructive power within man in the Peter-Pavel story. Even the setting for the tale is sinister. The sky darkens and "the angry red dies out of the west" (52); the wind moans across the prairie and rattles against the doors and window-pains: "presently in one of those sobbing intervals between the blasts, the coyotes tuned up their whining howl; one, two, three,

then all together (53).

The tale itself occurs in Russia one night in "the dead of winter" (56). Returning from a wedding ceremony pursued by wolves, Peter and Pavel sacrifice the bride and groom to their pursuers to lighten the sleigh, and return home to find themselves rejected in horror by the villagers and their own parents. They seek peace in America but the evil bird Misfortune settles on their home (51). The inset tale balances life and death, juxtaposing the wedding and violent death, love and self-preservation, the darkness of night and the ironic light of morning, the violence of nature and the depravity of man.²⁵ But Jim, with the eyes of youth, evades the horror of the tale for its romance; indeed he and Antonia are exhilarated by it "as if the wolves of the Ukraine had gathered that night long ago, and the wedding party been sacrificed, to give us a painful and peculiar pleasure" (61). And his dreams of the sledge and three horses, dashing through countryside which resembles at once Virginia and Nebraska, indicate the transfer of the Old World past to the present of America and youth.

The suicide of Mr. Shimerda takes place at the height of winter, and verifies Jim's statement that "man's strongest antagonist is the cold" (66). The struggle of man for survival against the destructive forces of an alien nature is too much for Anton. Yet despite the emphasis of the section on death and particularly on the realistic details of the suicide, the order of Mr. Shimerda's preparations, the body frozen by its blood to the ground "stiff as a dressed turkey" (102), the gash in the forehead and the "bunches of hair and stuff

sticking to the poles and the straw along the roof" (98), it suggests also life in the midst of death, and its basic associations for Jim are romantic. While his grandparents are at the Shimerda's, he dreams by the stove that the soul of Mr. Shimerda comes to share with him the warmth and gaiety of his old home, the weddings and dances and legends: "Outside I could hear the wind singing over hundreds of miles of snow. It was as if I had let the old man in out of the tormenting winter and were sitting there with him" (101). To Jim, life seems an adventure beside which even Robinson Crusoe seems dull and unreal (100).

Within the funeral ritual itself are implications of life and the continuation of life in the midst of death. Otto makes the coffin of fresh-smelling pine boards, to the song of the plane, "exciting, expectant": "They were such cheerful noises, seeming to promise new things for living people" (109). For Otto, death is a natural part of life, and his tales of the Black Tiger Mine describe "violent deaths and casual burings, and the queer fancies of dying men" (111). Young Anton Jelinek appears to aid the Shimerdas, handsome, "warm-hearted, and full of life. . . like a miracle in the midst of that grim business" (104) and Grandmother provides hot coffee and sugar cakes for the visitors to the Shimerdas, through the forms of social contact which death brings to life. Even the scene at the graveside, the body covered with a black shawl, the falling snow fine and icy like a sand-blast, the grave "a little spot in that snow-covered waste" (117) is countered by the juxtaposition of the grave years later, a little island of red grass in the sectioned fields and straight roads:

The road from the north curved a little to the east just there, and the road from the west swung out a little to the south; so that the grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island; and at twilight, under a new moon or the clear evening star, the dusty roads used to look like soft grey rivers flowing past it. . . along which the home-coming wagons rattled after sunset. (119)

Like the grave of Rosicky, it seems to relate more closely to life than to death. And in this passage, life gives way to death and death to life, summer to winter and winter to summer.²⁶

The implications of life within death in this chapter are realized in the opening of the following chapter in spring and new life, a spring which is active and vital, an experience in itself:

There were none of the signs of spring for which I used to watch in Virginia, no budding woods or blooming gardens. There was only--spring itself; the throb of it, the light restlessness, the vital essence of it everywhere: in the sky, in the swift clouds, in the pale sunshine, and in the warm, high wind--rising suddenly, sinking suddenly, impulsive and playful. . . . If I had been tossed down blindfold on that red prairie, I should have known that it was spring. Everywhere now there was the smell of burning grass. . . . Those light, swift fires, running about the country, seemed a part of the same kindling that was in the air. (119-20)

If the winter brings to the young people a recognition of death in the pattern of life, spring brings a realization of change in the everyday pattern which is a product of death. While Jim remains in school, Antonia works on the land like a man, ploughing and seeding with Ambrosch and bragging of her strength. And Jim sadly contrasts her, sunburned and sweaty, with the dreams which her father had for her.

The second summer on the land brings a temporary reconciliation between the two young people, who are developing and maturing

along with the fields. The description of summer emphasizes the fertility of the land, in a passage which picks up the note of overwhelming and almost threatening forces of nature in the Introduction:

July came on with that breathless, brilliant heat which makes the plains of Kansas and Nebraska the best corn country in the world. It seemed as if we could hear the corn growing in the night; under the stars one caught a faint crackling in the dewy, heavy-odoured cornfields where the feathered stalks stood so juicy and green. If all the great plain from the Missouri to the Rocky Mountains had been under glass, and the heat regulated by a thermometer, it could not have been better for the yellow tassels that were ripening and fertilizing the silk day by day. . . . Their yield would be one of the great economic facts, like the wheat crop of Russia, which underlie all the activities of men, in peace or war. (137)

Cather's celebration of the land is here at its height.²⁷ For the land and the seasons not only regulate the everyday pattern of life in those who live upon the farms, but determine the economic future of the whole of America, even of the world. And Book I closes with the completion of the yearly cycle, the consummation of life in late summer, and the reinstatement of friendship between the maturing boy and girl. *Ántonia's* remark: "I wish my papa live to see this summer. I wish no winter ever come again" (140) indicates the desire to hold on to this moment of security and prosperity, to grasp the life which it offers, and to avert the coming winter with its return to sterility and death. In the final Book of the novel, it is the Nebraska of this phase which Jim's memory will recreate, the sharing together of himself and *Ántonia* in the mood of the land, its fertility and its triumph over the forces of destruction and death.

Book II marks the movement of Jim, and the American people as

a whole, away from the land and a close relationship to nature. While in Book I, the patterns of everyday life and development are determined by the season, this is true to a much lesser extent in Black Hawk, the little prairie town midway between country and city. The pioneer experience is over and Jack and Otto pack their suitcases and depart for the new frontier of Colorado: "they got on the westbound train one morning, in their Sunday clothes, with their oilcloth valises--and I never saw them again" (144). The town represents a compromise between nature and art. The Harling family who have also been farmers, own a place "like a little farm, with a big barn and a garden, and an orchard and grazing lots--even a windmill" (147). Yet it is neither the one nor the other. The station agent dreams of trout-fishing in Wyoming, and the telegraph operator of Omaha and Denver "where there was some life" (218-9). For Jim only the river bluffs two miles away solace him for the confinement of the little town, "my compensation for the lost freedom of the farming country" (145).

But the pattern of the seasons is still evident, and although the Burdens move to Black Hawk in March, the narrative does not begin until August, when *Ántonia* becomes cook at the Harlings next door to Jim; thus the novel resumes at the point in the cycle where it left off, with the omission of one year. The muting of the seasonal pattern is evident not so much in the structure of the Book as the shift in emphasis away from description. Neither summer nor fall are important, except for the contrast which the latter provides to the warmth indoors, provided now by the Harling house rather than the Burden house. But

winter is rather more important for its destructive forces are unleashed, and it attacks the very philosophic bases of human existence and social life:

Winter comes down savagely over a little town on the prairie. The wind that sweeps in from the open country strips away all the leafy screens that hide one yard from another in summer, and the houses seem to draw closer together. . . . The pale, cold light of the winter sunset did not beautify--it was like the light of truth itself. When the smoky clouds hung low in the west, and the red sun went down behind them, leaving a pink flush on the snowy roofs and the blue drifts, then the wind sprang up afresh, with a kind of bitter song, as if it said: "This is reality, whether you like it or not. All those frivolities of summer, the light and shadow, the living mask of green that trembled over everything, they were lies, and this is what is underneath. This is the truth". It was as if we were being punished for loving the loveliness of summer. (172-3)

Here winter strips the pretenses from human life and lays the soul naked. It is no longer a natural part of agricultural life, while the fields lie resting under the snow and the animals in the barns; it is purposeless and antagonistic. Again man's activities centre around the fire and the hearth indoors which draw in the people from the streets "like magnets" (174). And indoors life continues on, with the social gatherings in the Harling house, the baking of cakes and cookies, the pulling of taffy, the tales of weddings and Christmases in Bohemia, even the morbid tale of the tramp who threw himself into the threshing machine one hot summer day when "the sun was so hot like it was going to burn the world up" (177). Tony's interjection "What would anyone want to kill themselves in summer for? . . . it's nice everywhere then" (179) indicates the ironic inversion of life and death, summer bringing with it death, and winter life in the stories

and tales, the social life of the community by the fireside.²⁸

The coming of spring too differs in the town, and winter dies a slow death. Man's changed relationship to nature influences its control of human life:

Winter lies too long in country towns; hangs on until it is stale and shabby, old and sullen. On the farm the weather was the great fact, and men's affairs went on underneath it, as the streams creep under the ice. But in Black Hawk the scene of human life was spread out shrunken and pinched, frozen down to the bare stalk. . . . By March the ice was rough and choppy, and the snow on the river bluffs was grey and mournful-looking. I was tired of school, tired of winter clothes, of the rutted streets, of the rutted streets, of the dirt drifts and the piles of cinders that had lain in the yards so long. (180-1)

The return of spring is welcome, and life is now centred in the Harling garden, breaking the soil, planting and clipping, digging in the orchards, or hunting for birdnests and playing hide-and-seek among the apple and cherry blossoms. And again the summer brings a change in the relationships of Jim and Antonia, and a separation which will only be resolved in Book V: "the summer which was to change everything was coming nearer every day. When boys and girls are growing up, life can't stand still, not even in the quietest of country towns" (193). The new dancing pavilion brings life and gaiety, a seeming purpose to the emptiness of town life. Set up under the shades of the cotton woods, among the pink bouncing Bets, it seems to return to the social cohesiveness of the country. But its effects are long-reaching. Antonia becomes interested in picnics, parties and dances, and finally moves to the Wick Cutters to have more time for entertainment. Jim prefers the company of the "hired girls" but is discouraged by Mrs. Harling and his grandparents

from attending the social events they attend. And thus his life becomes meaningless, caught like the telegrapher and the cigar man between the extremes of nature and art.

The last section of Book II, the July picnic by the river, provides a temporary return to the land and to Antonia before Jim leaves for the city, and his final separation from both. The passage of time between the summer of the Pavilion and this picnic is muted and occupies about a year. Its significance lies largely in Jim's alienation from the town and from Antonia, his psychological movement towards the city and the East. But on this day of July, when the dew is heavy on the meadow grass, the rose mallows and the bee-bushes are in bloom, and the country "empty and solitary except for the larks" (233), Jim's relationship to nature is once more idyllic and simple, a return to the past evident in the nostalgic note of his description: "the blossoms were unusually luxuriant and beautiful that summer" (235). The spot too is a refuge from the present; it recalls the friendship of Charlie Harling and Jim in summer days along the river, suggests the ancient connection of history in the Coronado reference (233-4),²⁹ reminds us of the drowsiness warmth and luxuriant fertility of the prairie, and is linked by Antonia with the Old World of Bohemia, through her memories of these flowers blooming in her yard, and her father and a friend playing the trombone under the blooming bushes of summer.

The picnic episode ends in a magnificent sunset which is symbolic of the end of a phase, not only in the life of Jim but in

that of America. A refuge of uncontrolled nature in the midst of fertile and cultivated fields dominated by man and by agricultural machinery, the spot overlooks the whole area, the river winding below, Black Hawk with its streets of houses and trees, the "rolling country, swelling gently until it met the sky" (238), the fertile crops of wheat and corn which the girls' fathers have planted. And under the sunset:

The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river. Out in the stream the sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them. The breeze sank to stillness. In the ravine a ringdove mourned plaintively. . . . Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. . . . On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk: the handles, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun. Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped and dropped until the red rim went beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie. (245)

It is the "sunset of the pioneer".³⁰ His phase has been momentary and passing. He came to face the alien nature of the West, conquered it and subjected it to the plough and cultivation, and his era is over, his heroism diminished by the demands of the new society. Jim moves away from the land and *Ántonia*, towards the City, the East and Art. His return is unreal and in memory only for he can never recreate the era which has passed in America.

Book III is Jim's period of "mental awakening", and his dis-

tance from the land is indicated through the rejection of the seasonal pattern as structure for the incidents, and the adoption of a literary and artificial quality in the few descriptions, in contrast to the earthiness or vitality of these passages in the first two books:

My window was open, and the earthy wind blowing through made me indolent. On the edge of the prairie, where the sun had gone down, the sky was turquoise blue, like a lake, with gold light throbbing in it. Higher up, in the utter clarity of the western slope, the evening star hung like a lamp suspended by silver chains--like the lamp engraved upon the title-page of old Latin texts. (263)

It is in Book III that Jim's love of nature is placed in the context of classical tradition. In his lectures on Vergil and the Georgics, Gaston Cleric tries to evoke for Jim the nature of the Old World, particularly of Paestum and his stay at the sea-temples, in a passage again romanticized and unreal:

The soft wind blowing through the roofless columns, the birds flying low over the flowering marsh grasses, the changing lights on the silver, cloud-hung mountains. He had wilfully stayed . . . until "the bride of old Tithonus" rose out of the sea, and the mountains stood sharp in the dawn. (261)

But Jim's attraction is not to the Old World but to the New, and the effect of Gaston's teaching is to sharpen the figures and incidents of his own past, to create in him a fuller appreciation of the countryside and its people:

Mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. . . . I suddenly found myself thinking of the places and people of my own infinitesimal past. They stood out, strengthened and simplified now, like the image of the plough against the sun. . . . In some strange way they accompanied me through all my new experiences. They were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how. (262)

Jim's associations with culture in the city too are connected with nature and spring. His memory of "Camille" is integrated with the scent of lilacs, new leaves and blossoms after the rain, and the wetness of puddles and trees so that he later comments of the play "Wherever and whenever that piece is put on, it is April" (278).

Book IV is already retrospective in tone, as Jim looks back to what is virtually his lost past, even though he is only removed from this past by a few years.³¹ The incident is set in late summer, between Jim's university years at Harvard and his entrance to Law School, and his separation from *Ántonia* is indicated by the distancing of the narrative through the second-hand account of the Widow Stevens. Although the emphasis of the description is upon the beauty and development of the fertile land, there are elements of nostalgia in the passage which are produced by Jim's separation from the land, and implications of the change and of mechanization which will mar the country scenes of One of Ours and "Nebraska" are already evident:

The wheat harvest was over, and here and there along the horizon I could see black puffs of smoke from the steam threshing-machines. The old pasture land was now being broken up into wheat-fields and cornfields, the red grass was disappearing, and the whole face of the country was changing. There were wooden houses where the old sod dwellings used to be, and little orchards, and big red barns; all this meant happy children, contented women, and men who saw their lives coming to a fortunate issue. The windy springs and the blazing summers, one after another, had enriched and mellowed that flat tableland; all the human effort that had gone into it was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility. The changes seemed beautiful and harmonious to me; it was like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea. . . . I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modelling of human faces. (306)

This implicit nostalgia of Book IV becomes realized in Book V, where Jim returns to Nebraska and to *Ántonia*. *Ántonia*'s farm symbolizes the fertility and order of the present:

There was the deepest peace in that orchard. It was surrounded by a triple enclosure; the wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge which kept out the hot winds of summer and held fast to the protecting snows of winter. The hedges were so tall that we could see nothing but the blue sky above them, neither the barn roof nor the windmill. The afternoon sun poured down on us through the drying grape leaves. The orchard seemed full of sun like a cup, and we could smell the ripe apples on the trees. The crabs hung on the branches as thick as beads on a string, purple red, with a thin silver glaze over them. Some hens and ducks had crept through the hedge and were pecking at the fallen apples. The drakes were handsome fellows, with pinkish-grey bodies, their heads and necks covered with iridescent green feathers which grew close and full, changing to blue like a peacock's neck.³²
(341-2)

But even here, in the perfect consummation of desires and the idyllic nature of the relationships, there is a certain quality which recreates for Jim the real past:

Everything was as it should be: the strong smell of sunflowers and ironweed in the dew, the clear blue and gold of the sky, the evening star, the purr of the milk into the pails, the grunts and squeals of the pigs fighting over their supper. I began to feel the loneliness of the farm-boy at evening, when the chores seem everlastingly the same, and the world so far away. (346-7)

And this yearning for the distant past almost belies the assertion of complete fulfillment in *Ántonia* and the land. For in reality, *Ántonia* is not the girl of the past, however Jim may insist that she is unchanged, and her fertile farm is not the Nebraska that Jim carries in his heart. Strange children play in the Harling yard, the mountain ash has been cut down and the Lombardy pine is only a stump. The

passage of years has changed Black Hawk and the surrounding country, and only to the north does Jim really find what he is seeking, his own past:

I took a long walk north of the town, out into the pastures where the land was so rough that it had never been ploughed up, and the long red grass of early times still grew shaggy over the draws and hillocks. Out there I felt at home again. Overhead the sky was that indescribable blue of autumn; bright and shadowless, hard as enamel. To the south I could see the dun-shaded river bluffs that used to look so big to me, and all about stretched drying cornfields, of the pale gold colour I remembered so well. Russian thistles were blowing across the uplands and piling against the wire fences like barricades. Along the cattle-paths the plumes of golden-rod were already fading into sun-warmed velvet, grey with gold threads in it. I had escaped from the curious depression that hangs over little towns. (369-70)

Here Jim finds a half-mile of the old road which "used to run like a wild thing across the open prairie, clinging to the high places and circling and doubling like a rabbit" (371). Thus the novel returns to its beginnings, that day also in late summer:

This was the road over which *Ántonia* and I had come on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither. . . . Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past. (371-2)

Thus the road is a symbol of Jim's return not only to *Ántonia* but to the land and his own youth. And this return marks his recognition of the shaping force of Nature on man's life and career.

Although *My Ántonia* is essentially a novel of Jim Burden's quest for self, the role of *Ántonia* as a shaping force of this experience is of considerable significance.³³ For *Ántonia* is at once a symbol of the land and of the people on this land, and she comes to

symbolize for Jim his whole childhood experience and the impinging of this past on the present:

Do you know, *Ántonia*, since I've been away, I think of you more often than of anyone else in this part of the world. . . . The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it. You really are a part of me. (321)

This use of *Ántonia* as symbol, effectively subtle in the first four books, becomes forced and blatant in Book V, where she emerges like Alexandra as the fertility goddess of the prairies. Brown, flat-chested, with grizzled hair and broken teeth, she is nevertheless described in terms which are superhuman:

She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting. . . . It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races. (353)

As a person, *Ántonia* is not real, for she exists always as an objectification of Jim's consciousness, like Wordsworth's Leechgatherer.

Although she shows courage and endurance, these qualities are passive rather than active as in Alexandra, and she resembles Marie Shabata in her health, vitality and projection of life rather than Cather's real pioneers with their dreams of the frontier and their creative imagination. *Ántonia*'s significance lies in the memories which she recreates for Jim, memories of universal experiences of life and death, the seasons and planting and reaping:

I was thinking about Antonia and her children. . . . That moment, when they all came tumbling out of the cave into the light, was a sight any man might have come far to see. Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade--that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer: Antonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Antonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snow-storm; Antonia coming in with her work-team along the evening skyline. She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. (352-3)

The connections between Antonia and the land are made clear throughout the novel. Although she does come to live in Black Hawk with the Harlings, their home is almost a farm in itself, with a barn, a large garden and an orchard. When she plans to marry Larry Donovan, she hesitates: "I'm a country girl. . . and I doubt if I'll be able to manage so well for him in a city" (309) and after the marriage fails and she returns to the land, she remarks to Jim: "I'd always be miserable in a city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here" (320). Finally in Part V she affirms like Neighbour Rosicky: "I belong on a farm. I'm never lonesome here like I used to be in town" (343).

The descriptions of Antonia too develop her relationship to nature and the country through the choice of symbol and image. She is early associated with the life-force in the novel through her preservation of the life of the last grasshopper, and her complexion reflects her vitality: "[Her eyes] were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood. Her skin was brown, too, and in her cheeks she had a glow of rich, dark colour" (23).³⁴

Francis Harling describes this colour as "splendid. . . like those big dark red plums" (153). Even her voice suggests this life-force, "deep, a little husky, and one always heard the breath vibrating behind it" (176). The first time Jim sees her ploughing on the land, after the death of her father, he notes her physical strength and endurance, her out-door qualities, her arms and throat "burned as brown as a sailor's" and her neck coming "strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf" (122). Yet despite this strength, *Ántonia* is supple; she has the vigour and vitality, "the carriage and freedom of movement" of all the hired girls who are "physically . . . almost a race apart" (198) in contrast to the apathetic town girls:

[The town girls] stayed indoors in winter because of the cold, and in summer because of the heat. When one danced with them, their bodies never moved inside their clothes; their muscles seemed to ask one thing--not to be disturbed. I remember those girls merely as faces in the schoolroom, gay and rosy, or listless and dull, cut off below the shoulders, like cherubs by the ink-smeared tops of the high desks. (199)

In Book V, Jim finds again the *Ántonia* he has lost, her skin still firm, her eyes unlike those of any one else among the thousands of faces he has seen, her essential vitality undiminished: "*Ántonia* had not lost the fire of life" (336). And Jim turns back to her, as Tom returns to his Mesa and Auclair in Shadows on the Rock to his salon, as a centre of security and stability in the midst of change:

As I confronted her, the changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger. She was there, in the full vigour of her personality, battered but not diminished, looking at me, speaking to me in the husky, breathy voice I remembered so well. (331-332)

As we observe here, the descriptions of *Ántonia* are limited and develop a few central characteristics: her vitality, her eyes and voice, her colour and movement through the symbols of sunlit pools, plums, the bole of a tree, the dance. That the centre of the novel is not really *Ántonia* as a person, but the associations and memories which centre around her, becomes clear in Book V, where *Ántonia* is identified clearly as symbol of Jim's past life, and of the fertility of the country.³⁵ Her farmhouse is "enclosed by a thorny locust hedge" and "buried" in a "forest" of hollyhocks (339). The fertility associations are strong: "Ducks and geese ran quacking across my path. White cats were sunning themselves among yellow pumpkins on the porch steps" (330). And there are the children themselves, "ten or eleven of them by this time, I guess" says Lena (329) and the number is never made definite. *Ántonia* introduces them to Jim "like a mother cat bringing in her kittens" (332) and Jim later describes them emerging from the fruit-cave, perhaps a symbol of that first cave of the Shimerdas:

They all came running up the steps together, big and little, tow heads and gold heads and brown, and flashing little legs; a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight. It made me dizzy for a moment. (338-9)

It is in these children that Jim Burden finds his future and the symbolic children which his own marriage has not produced. They are the heirs of Jim and *Ántonia*, and to them belong the land and the future of America.³⁶ Thus *My Ántonia* is more affirmative than the ending of *O Pioneers!* which concludes with the rejection of human relationships. And like Alexandra, *Ántonia* becomes a type of corn

goddess who recreates herself in the fertility of the yellow wheat and the garden and in "the shining eyes of youth".

But despite the idyllic nature of Book V, My Ántonia does affirm like O Pioneers! the realistic problems of life on a new frontier, and thus it contributes more fairly to the country-town debate than the later works One of Ours, A Lost Lady and the idealized "Neighbour Rosicky". For the prosperity and comfort of Book V can be appreciated only in terms of the struggle which the immigrant families undergo, the hardships and insuperable difficulties recorded in Books I to III. This life of struggle is only vicariously part of Jim's experience, for the Burden household has already achieved a balance between the order of man and of nature, and the experiences of the new pioneers are measured against their life as norm.

In Book I, the life of the Shimerdas illustrates the real problems of the immigrant pioneers, their discomforts and sufferings, their labour and their ultimate reward. During the first winter, they live in a dug-out:

I could still see nothing but rough red hillocks, and draws with shelving banks and long roots hanging out where the earth had crumbled away. Presently, against one of those banks, I saw a sort of shed, thatched with the same wine-coloured grass that grew everywhere. Near it tilted a shattered windmill frame, that had no wheel. (21-2)

The two boys and Mr. Shimerda sleep in the dug-out barn with the oxen, the two girls in a hollow cave burrowed into the earth at the back of the shed. The house itself is dark with only one window, and a gunny-sack thrown across the door to keep out the cold, so that the air is stifling and the lantern glimmers feebly over the stove. When the

Burdens visit them in December, they have no coffee, little flour and they live on a "sour, ashy-grey bread" (31), the rotten potatoes that the grocer gives them, and even prairie-dog meat. The little girls wear cotton dresses and the whole family has only one winter coat between them. Although they had left Bohemia with a thousand dollars and their passage, they spent heavily on the high rail fare to Nebraska, the considerable exchange in New York, the price of Krajeck's land, and the horses, oxen and old machinery. Mr. Shimerda's suicide is a direct result of the harsh conditions of life for the immigrant-artist in the new world. Yet in the spring, the Shimerdas are "fairly equipped to begin their struggle with the soil" (120). They have a four-room house, built with the help of neighbours, a windmill, a chicken house and poultry, and a milk-cow. Ambrosch and Antonia are in the fields from sunrise to sundown, breaking sod and planting, and in the autumn they hire out during the threshing for cash. Thus they have begun their rise in the New World to a position of more comfort and security.³⁷

There are other references in the early Books to the problems faced by these immigrants. The Russians Peter and Pavel, are not as fortunate as the Shimerdas. They own a neat house, built on a grassy slope with a windmill and a garden of melons, cucumbers and squashes, but they are plagued by ills, Pavel's recurring tuberculosis, and in particular the exorbitant loan payments on the land. Although Peter mortgages his pigs, horses, milk-cow and eventually the land, "the debt grew faster than any crop he planted", as a result of the

operations of Wick Cutter "the merciless Black Hawk money-lender" (50-1). After the death of Pavel, Peter auctions the farm, kisses the cow as she is led away by her new owner, watches his house stripped bare of furniture and even pots and pans, and leaves the land forever, to become cook for a railway construction camp.

In Book II, Jim learns something of the background of the other "hired girls", Tiny and Lena. Jim observes that he had never seen Lena wearing a hat, or even shoes or stockings, before she came to town (160, but see 167); she had always been "bareheaded and barefooted, scantily dressed in tattered clothing. . . . I thought of her as something wild, that had always lived on the prairie, because I had never seen her under a roof" (165). She later tells Jim "She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man and work piling up around a sick woman" (291). She had never slept without three in a bed or remembered a time when she was not carrying around a younger child or washing for babies. She could not get the smell of cattle off her clothes and skin, and a bath on Saturday involved two trips to the windmill to carry water, heating it on the stove in a wash-boiler after the others were in bed, and then sleeping with two children who had not had a bath unless she had given them one. "You can't tell me anything about family life. I've had plenty to last me" (292). As a result, Lena remains free of entanglements, despite her attraction for men such as Ole Benson, her landlord, the Polish violin teacher, and even Jim whose dreams of her are frankly sexual.³⁸ But Lena wants her sisters to have things which she did not have: "I wish father didn't have such

bad luck with his farm machinery; then I could buy more things for my sisters. I'm going to get Mary a new coat this fall, if the sulky plough's never paid for!" (240). And Tiny's family believe that she must be rich on her town wages: "I'm dressed so fine!" (240). These girls then provide for Jim a broader experience of the background and problems of the pioneer than *Ántonia* alone, and their future contrasts with *Ántonia*'s and indicate that in returning to the land, she has made a deliberate choice of nature over the city and art.

In contrast to these harsher details, we have the sentimentalized portraits of Otto and Jake who are pioneers of the literary "heart-of-gold" school. Otto has been a stagecoach driver, a bartender, a coffin-maker and a miner, but he is a story-book desperado with twisted moustaches, a sinister scar across one cheek and cowboy boots tooled in roses, lover's knots and "undraped female figures" which he tells Jim are angels (13). In spite of his tales of "outlaws and desperate characters he has known" (68), he belongs to the category of Ray Kennedy, Tom Outland and Pierre Charron. He writes his mother on Christmas day "no matter where he was, and no matter how long it had been since his last letter" (85) and he provides the manger scene which decorates the tree at Christmas out of his trunk, complete with a bleeding heart "in tufts of paper lace" (83). Jim summarizes the picture of Jake and Otto:

I can see them now: . . . Jake with his heavy features, so rudely moulded that his face seemed, somehow, unfinished; Otto with his half-ear and the savage scar that made his upper lip curl so ferociously under his twisted moustache. As I remember them, what unprotected faces they were; their very roughness and violence made them defenceless. These boys had no practised manner behind which they could retreat and hold people at a distance. They had only their hard fists to batter at the world with. (83-4)

And like true pioneers, they take the westbound train after the Burdens move to town, and are never seen again. They mark the end of the frontier in Nebraska, and the shifting of the west to the mines of Colorado.

But while it does present a realistic view of the early days in the American West, My Ántonia examines in a harsh light the life of the small town in the tradition of Lewis' Main Street. Cather herself had objected to the negativism of Lewis' depiction of these little country towns:

[Lewis] had been satisfied to get an external view of the small prairie centre. She explained, defensively, that in every town like Gopher prairie there existed at least one family, probably several, where, at least in one field, standards of world culture, music, the arts, the languages were preserved. She had brought in such a family--that of the storekeeper and grain-merchant--in My Ántonia. But, she said, when Sinclair Lewis looked at his small town, he found nothing of the sort--only commonness, cheapness, ignorance. He had the point of view of the drummer who stops in the businessman's hotel; gossips with the loungers at the drug counters!³⁹

While later Lewis and Cather became close friends and Cather estimated the range of his work differently,⁴⁰ the comment is interesting, for despite her portrayal of the Harling family, Cather's presentation of the small town in My Ántonia is remarkably similar to that of Lewis. Black Hawk is caught between art and nature, between the trout streams of Wyoming and the night "life" of Denver and Omaha (218). The majority of its people are bored or discontented, and the coming of the dance pavilion brings at least a temporary preoccupation for the young people:

At last there was something to do in those long, empty

summer evenings, when the married people sat like images on their front porches, and the boys and girls tramped and tramped the board sidewalks--northward to the edge of the open prairie, south to the depot, then back again to the post-office, the ice-cream parlour, the butcher shop. (196)

The standards of the little town are rigid and conventional, and Jim heartily despises them.⁴¹ Black Hawk fathers pay the bills, water the grass, walk the baby, and on Sunday take their families driving (157). Black Hawk mothers paint china, like Mrs. Wick Cutter, and Black Hawk sons, although they prefer the vitality and suppleness of the "hired girls", reject them in the end for the artificial mores of small town society:

The Black Hawk boys looked forward to marrying Black Hawk girls, and living in a brand-new little house with best chairs that must not be sat upon, and hand-painted china that must not be used. . . . The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth. (201-2)

Thus Black Hawk represents the typical American prairie town of the Revolt-from-the-Village era, caught between the ideal of the West as an uncorrupted Eden, and the East as a source of culture for the World:

On starlight nights I used to pace up and down those long, cold streets, scowling at the little, sleeping houses . . . flimsy shelters, most of them poorly built of light wood, with spindle porch-posts horribly mutilated by the turning-lathe. Yet for all their frailness, how much jealousy and envy and unhappiness some of them managed to contain! The life that went on in them seemed to me made of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking and cleaning; devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip. This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark. The growing piles of ashes and cinders in the back yards were the only evidence that the wasteful, consuming process of life went on at all. (219-20) ⁴²

Cather's rejection of this society is, at the moment, confined to the village itself and the little towns between the land and the city. And Jim escapes from his boredom to the university, and east to Harvard, where it is implied he will find his niche. It is only later, in One of Ours and particularly The Professor's House, that Cather extends the condemnation of this life to the whole of middle-class bourgeois society.

But like Carl, Jim Burden does not find in the city a centre of meaning for life and turns back to the land for security and even a refuge. He has a successful business life, which has involved the development of the country: "He loves with a personal passion the great country through which his railway runs and branches. His faith in it and his knowledge of it have played an important part in its development" (Introd.). Yet he is searching for a further meaning, and he finds this only in *Ántonia* and her children to which he must return: "There were enough Cuzacks to play with for a long while yet. Even after the boys grew up, there would always be Cuzack himself!" (370).

Thus Jim's search for order ends not in culture and art but in the land, and he returns to his own beginnings to find himself. He does not ask with Carl "Wo bist du, wo bist du, mein geliebtest Land?" (118) for he finds complete fulfillment in the life of *Ántonia*, a refuge from change and emptiness. But despite Jim, the land is changing, the era passing. And the next novel will examine the loss of nature as a centre of meaning, and the futility of a society which has no art to substitute for it.

Man and Art: "Primus ego. . ." (264).

Although My Ántonia resolves in Jim Burden's return to the land as a centre of order for experience, it is in a sense a novel of art in that its centre, unlike that of O Pioneers!, is the quest of the artist for order and meaning in his existence, which is the theme of the typical artist novel.⁴³ This meaning he finds not only in nature but in his awakening to culture and art, first through Anton Shimerda, then the Harlings of Black Hawk, and the little university town of Lincoln and the East with their challenge both to his developing intellect and to his love of literature and drama. Finally the domestic art of Ántonia comes for him to symbolize the link between culture and the land, the Old World and the New.

Jim's importance in the novel as an artist is, in part, related to his identification with Cather herself.⁴⁴ Both are fascinated by the line of Vergil: "Primus ego in patriam mecum. . . deducam Musas"-- "I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country" (264)--and for Cather as for Jim, the search for the meaning in life ended in the past: "Life began for me. . . when I ceased to admire and began to remember" (446). Of this relationship Sergeant tells us:

I was absorbed by the autobiographical elements of the book. . . . As I read My Ántonia, I learned far more than she [Cather] had ever recounted; from the point where, for her, Virginia ended, with an interminable railroad journey "across the great midland plain of North America".⁴⁵

Jim is also the artist in terms of his role in the novel; he is not only the narrator, but the whole of the novel is an attempt to explore his own expanding consciousness and to bring order to his memories of

the past and his perceptions of reality.⁴⁶ His technique is deliberate and artistically effective, although his apology is ingenuous: "I didn't take time to arrange it; I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn't any form. It hasn't any title either" (Introd.).⁴⁷ Jim's literary abilities are also implied in his Convocation address, of which we are told rather vaguely: "It stated with fervour a great many things which I had lately discovered" (229) and of which *Ántonia* says admiringly, "There ain't a lawyer in Black Hawk could make a speech like that. . . . It must make you very happy, Jim, to have fine thoughts like that in your mind all the time, and to have words to put them in" (230).

Although he has few explicit characteristics of the artist, such as Carl Lindstrum, yet Jim Burden suggests the artist in his sensitivity, his perception of the value of art and culture, and his effective isolation from society. Since Jim is the narrator, we have no description of his face or hands to correspond with such passages in other novels, except for the comments of the "I" figure in the original introduction, deleted in the revised text:

Jim is still able to lose himself in those big Western dreams. Though he is over forty now, he meets new people and new enterprises with the impulsiveness by which his boyhood friends remember him. He never seems to me to grow older. His fresh colour and sandy hair and quick-changing blue eyes are those of a young man, and his sympathetic, solicitous interest in women is as youthful as it is Western and American.⁴⁸

His idealism and his imagination have contributed to his country, and he has raised capital for enterprise in Montana and Wyoming which has "helped young men out there to do remarkable things in mines and timber

and oil".⁴⁹ We are told that he is a dreamer, by Frances Harling, who accuses him of putting "a kind of glamour over" the country girls (229), and by Cather herself in the introduction: "The romantic disposition which often made him seem very funny as a boy, has been one of the strongest elements in his success" (Introd.). And Jim too indicates that his dream of *Ántonia* is more important to him than an understanding of her real nature; he hesitates to visit her in Part V:

In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again. (328)

That he sees in *Ántonia* essentially what he has always seen only confirms the nature of his vision.

Yet there are really two Jim Burdens in the novel, as there are two Thea Kronbergs, the one corresponding to the nature and experience of Willa Cather, the other conforming to some outside standard. For we can question Jim's sensitivity at a number of points. Although he despises the Black Hawk boys for rejecting the hired girls and choosing conventional wives, he himself does the same thing. He can say to *Ántonia* when she is betrayed and isolated from society by an illegitimate child: "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister,--anything that a woman can be to a man" (321). Yet he is free to marry her, and his unconscious choice of the past tense indicates that he, and Cather, have no intention of permitting this. In place of this he picks for a wife a girl "handsome, energetic, executive, but. . . unimpressonable and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm" (Introd.) and his marriage is sterile in contrast to *Ántonia*'s fertility. Brown

rightly suggests that the unrevised preface, which deals at some length with this failure in marriage and the character of his wife, questions the reliability of Jim's judgement of women, and hence of *Ántonia* herself.⁵⁰ Despite these contradictions and problems, for the sake of the novel we must accept on faith that Jim is an artist and that he is capable of writing *My Ántonia*, of assessing the people and places of his own experience and of ordering them into the unified whole which is the novel.

As the perception of nature is filtered through Jim's consciousness, the novel presents his gradual awakening to culture and to art. His first approach to art is through domestic order, which is integrated to the central theme of *Ántonia* and her development in America of the culture of the Old World so that it does not seem obtrusive as in later novels. In Book I it is the Burden household which represents this order, in the farm and garden, and in the safe and secure domestic circle where Jim finds refuge. Jim's first impressions of the household are intense and visual: the white-washed and plastered walls, the white curtains at the window with pots of geraniums and wandering jew on the sill, the smell of baking gingerbread and the Maltese cat rubbing herself against the tub (9-10). The garden too is ordered and at the peak of fertility, its potatoes, pumpkins, ground-cherries and melons ready for gathering, and here *Ántonia* finds a refuge from the way of life in her own dark cave. And Mr. Shimerda finds in the Burden household the peace and order which he believes "had vanished from the face of the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left so far behind" (86).

The Harling household in Black Hawk corresponds to the Burden household in Part I as a centre of domestic order and an influence on Ántonia to counter the slovenly ways of Mrs. Shimerda. Like the Burdens, the Harlings have, in the midst of town, a small farm and orchards, a garden and even grazing lots. Here Jim joins the Harling children and Ántonia to make taffy and popcorn on winter evenings, to bake cakes and tell stories. The home is "warm and brightly lighted, with comfortable chairs and sofas, and gay pictures on the wall" (175) and the lights and gaiety inside draw Jim on cold winter nights with the same attraction as the lights of the church and the music of the choir. Ántonia learns much from Mrs. Harling, for their characters are basically similar and they are both domestic artists, like the German housewife who serves her family with goose on Thanksgiving:⁵¹

There was a basic harmony between Ántonia and her mistress. They had strong, independent natures, both of them. They knew what they liked, and were not always trying to imitate other people. They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters asleep in them. They ridiculed conceited people and were quick to help unfortunate ones. Deep down in each of them there was a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate but invigorating. (180)

In Part V Ántonia becomes a symbol of the domestic artist like the Annie Pavelka on which she is modelled of whom Cather said: "She was one of the truest artists I ever knew in the keenness and sensitivity of her enjoyment, in her love of people and in her willingness to take pains".⁵² Ántonia has combined the arts of the Old World and the New, the Bohemian customs of the Shimerdas, the Norwegian culture of the Harlings, and the Virginia inheritance of the Burdens. She

belongs properly to the country, but when Jim suggests that she should never have gone to town, she replies:

I'd never have known anything about cooking or housekeeping if I hadn't. I learned nice ways at the Harlings', and I've been able to bring my children up so much better. Don't you think they are pretty well-behaved for country children? If it hadn't been for what Mrs. Harling taught me, I expect I'd have brought them up like wild rabbits. (343-4)

Thus *Ántonia* becomes a symbol of the fertility of nature ordered by man. Her orchards bear cherries, gooseberries, currants and apples. Her fruit-cellar contains barrels of dill-pickles, chopped watermelon rind, glass jars of preserved cherries, strawberries, crabapples and spiced plums. She bakes bread every Wednesday and Saturday, and her kolaches have become a legend not only for Jim but for her children. Thus she comes to symbolize the art of country life in accord with nature: "She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last" (353).

But in Book I Jim also comes into contact with art and culture beyond the boundaries of the little prairie town in *Ántonia's* father, Anton Shimerda, whose influence remains with Jim throughout his life. Although his main trade in Bohemia has been a craft, working on tapestry and upholstery materials, Anton's most precious possession is the fiddle which he has brought with him to the New World. In Bohemia, *Ántonia* tells Jim he made fine cloth "like what you not got here", played the horn and violin and read so many books that priests would come to talk to him (124). And *Ántonia* remembers sitting in summer under the blooms of the bushes to listen to her father talk with his friends, "beautiful

talk, like what I never hear in this country. . . . About music, and the woods, and about God, and when they were young" (236). He has the personality of the artist; he is isolated from society in the West, sensitive and with the understanding and vision of the dreamer: "Our faces were open books to him. When his deep-seeing eyes rested on me, I felt as if he were looking far ahead into the future for me, down the road I would have to travel" (87). His hands too are indicative of his ability: "white and well-shaped. . . they looked calm, somehow, and skilled" (24). Yet he is unable to survive the harsh conditions of pioneer life. His eyes become melancholy, deep-set, his face grey like the colour of ashes, his shoulders thin and stooped. And here he finds no place for his art:

My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music anymore. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for play, he shake his head no. Some days he take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings, like this, but he never make the music. He don't like this kawn-tree. (89)

Although Mr. Shimerda dies in the early pages of the novel, his influence over Jim is profound.⁵³ *Ántonia* asks "You won't forget my father, Jim?" and he replies "I will never forget him" (124). When *Ántonia* comments that Jim's commencement address made her think of her papa, Jim replies "I thought about your papa when I wrote my speech, Tony. . . . I dedicated it to him" (230-1). At the picnic of Book II, Jim tells *Ántonia* of his dream that Mr. Shimerda appeared to him on the night after his death, to warm himself at the fire, and adds, "even now, when I passed his grave, I always thought of him as being among the woods and fields that were so dear to him" (236) and in Book IV, Jim and *Ántonia* discuss

the influence of Mr. Shimerda on their lives as Ántonia indicates:

Look at my papa here; he's been dead all these years, and yet he is more real to me than almost anybody else. He never goes out of my life. I talk to him and consult him all the time. The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him. (320)

Although Ántonia herself does not show this artistic inheritance except through her domestic abilities, her son Leo inherits his role as artist, along with Mr. Shimerda's fiddle which is as yet too big for him but which he plays well for a boy who has taught himself. Leo has the character of the artist, too. His eyes are "deep-set, gold-green in colour, and seemed sensitive to the light"; his face is faun-like (348) and he is restless, even possessive and demanding of attention. He is hurt physically more often than the others, and he is intuitive in understanding, sharing with Thea and Lucy Gayheart the sense of secret power which marks the artist:

His expression was droll; it dismissed me lightly. "This old fellow is no different from other people. He doesn't know my secret". He seemed conscious of possessing a keener sense of enjoyment than other people; his quick recognitions made him impatient of deliberate judgements. He always knew what he wanted without thinking. (354)

Thus in Leo and in Jim, his spiritual heir, the art of Mr. Shimerda lives on into the next generation.⁵⁴

In Book II, Jim comes into contact with art in its primitive or folk mode. Blind d'Arnault, a Negro blinded by illness at the age of three weeks, had been an infant prodigy, learning the piano while listening to his mistress practise and immediately "feeling out the pattern that lay all ready-made on the big and little keys" (188). He had absolute pitch and a memory that was remarkable so that he could

repeat any piece which was played for him, but he never learned any finish:

He was always a Negro prodigy who played barbarously and wonderfully. As piano-playing, it was perhaps abominable, but as music it was something real, vitalized by a sense of rhythm that was stronger than his other physical senses--that not only filled his dark mind, but worried his body incessantly. To hear him, to watch him, was to see a Negro enjoying himself as only a Negro can. (189)

Through Blind d'Arnault, Jim learns the joy of art and of creativity which is something apart from training and technique, but is inborn and communicates itself to those around. D'Arnault is able to "draw the dance music out of" the piano (191), and as a result of his skill, despite the ugliness of his shrunken eyelids, Jim decides he has "the happiest face I had seen since I left Virginia" (184). Jim finds in him the appeal of folk art which Thea finds in the Mexicans of The Song of the Lark, an appeal which cannot be replaced by training but which must be innate.⁵⁵

Yet in Book II it is primarily through the Harling family that Jim comes to appreciate culture and art. Cather's reference to the position of the Harlings in her comment on Sinclair Lewis indicates the weight that she felt she had placed on them.⁵⁶ Each of the Harlings plays the piano, and the Harling home is a centre for creativity, where the children learn to dance, play charades, or devise their own costume balls. On Saturday Mrs. Harling would tell the stories of the operas and play selections from each: 'Martha', 'Norma', 'Rigoletto':

Except when the father was at home, the Harling house was never quiet. . . . There was usually somebody at the piano. Julia was the only one who was held down to regular hours of practising, but they all played. When Frances came home at noon, she played

until dinner was ready. When Sally got back from school, she sat down in her hat and coat and drummed the plantation melodies that Negro minstrel troupes brought to town. Even Nina played the Swedish Wedding March. Mrs. Harling had studied the piano under a good teacher, and somehow she managed to practise every day. . . . I can see her at this moment: her short, square person planted firmly on the stool, her little fat hands moving quickly and neatly over the keys, her eyes fixed on the music with intelligent concentration. (157-8)

The emphasis which is placed on the Harling family is not as pronounced as Cather herself seemed to think;⁵⁷ nevertheless it is the Harlings, Anton Shimerda and Blind d'Arnault who represent the standards of culture against which Jim comes to judge the sterility of the majority of the villagers, who have no other outlet for their creativity than to water the grass or paint china.

Book III presents Jim's mental awakening to the world of culture and art, in the little university town of Lincoln, and Lena Lingard expresses this experience in her statement: "I'd be willing to work like a slave, it seems to me, to live in a place where there are theatres" (268-9). In this section, Lena provides a counter to *Ántonia* for she comes from a similar pioneering background and moves away from the land towards the city and art. The importance of Lena to Jim indicates the increasing distance between him and *Ántonia* yet provides a connection between Books II and III and also links *Ántonia* to the narrative through a series of verbal references which run through the Book. Lena is affected in particular by this new wide world of culture, and Jim comments, "everything was wonderful to her, and everything was true. It was like going to revival meetings with someone who was always being converted" (271). The play "Camille" summarizes this development of

cultural taste in Lena and Jim, and Jim contrasts it with their previous ignorance of art: "A couple of jack rabbits, run in off the prairie, could not have been more innocent of what awaited them than were Lena and I" (272). Even the set of the play seems remarkable:

[It was] the most brilliant, worldly, the most enchantingly gay scene I had ever looked upon. . . . I seem to remember gilded chairs and tables (arranged hurriedly by footmen in white gloves and stockings), linen of dazzling whiteness, glittering glass, silver dishes, a great bowl of fruit, and the reddest of roses. (273)

And the characters and their clever conversation expand the narrow world in which Jim has lived before coming to Lincoln:

The room was invaded by beautiful women and dashing young men, laughing and talking together. . . . Their talk seemed to open to one the brilliant world in which they lived; every sentence made one older and wiser, every pleasantry enlarged one's horizon. (273)

The world of illusion is effectively recreated. We see through the perspective of the older Jim who recognizes that the actress playing Marguerite is in reality "already old, with a ravaged countenance and a physique curiously hard and stiff" (274), the naive fascination of the young Jim who believes her lovely, "young, ardent, reckless, disillusioned, under sentence, feverish, avid of pleasure" (274) and before the last act, both Jim and Lena are weeping into their handkerchiefs. But here too in his first real play, Jim comes to realize that art can perpetuate a moment beyond time, and can communicate the spirit of a lost age "across long years and several languages, through the person of an infirm old actress" (278).⁵⁸ And this play becomes integrated so closely with the memory of his own youth this night in spring when the lilacs are blooming that he observes later "Wherever and whenever that piece is put on, it is April"

(278).

But while Lena shares his experience of the world of culture and theatre, it is his instructor Gaston Cleric who initiates him into the world of literature and ideas, in particular the world of the classics and Vergil: "when one first encounters that world everything fades for a time" (258). Among the instructors in the little college just sprung from the bare prairie, where the instructors are pioneer school-teachers or wandering ministers, with a few young men fresh from graduate-schools, Cleric stands out for his abilities as an artist, and Jim remarks that he would have been a great poet if he had not absorbed his energies in bursts of imagination and in the effort to communicate *with* his audience. Cleric has the ability to make the world of the past real: "He could bring the drama of antique life before one out of the shadows--white figures against blue backgrounds" (261) and he recreates for Jim the poetry of Vergil, his "perfect utterance" of the Georgics, and his literary ambitions to be "the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country" (263-4).⁵⁹

Yet even here, in the midst of his excitement over the newly discovered classics and over Cleric himself, Jim is concerned not so much with the literature itself but with its relationship to his own past life:

Mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. . . . They were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how. (262)

It is here that Jim recognizes the people and places of his past to be part of his own mental epic; that they exist not in themselves, but in

their relation to his experience. And the reappearance of Lena Lingard, now established as a dressmaker in Lincoln, connects for Jim the poetry of Vergil and the real life of the country and its people which he himself has known:

When I closed my eyes I could hear them all laughing--the Danish laundry girls and the three Bohemian Maries. Lena had brought them all back to me. It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Vergil. If there were no girls like them, there would be no poetry. . . . As I sat down to my book at last, my old dream about Lena coming across the harvest-field in her short skirt seemed to me like the memory of an actual experience. It floated before me on the page like a picture, and underneath it stood the mournful line: "Optima dies. . . prima fugit"
(270-1) ⁵⁹

This passage is more than a contrived link between the first two Books and the irrelevance of the third. It is in reality, the beginning of My Antonia, the point where Jim's experience of the his own past fuses with literary tradition and the culture of the present although oddly Antonia is not mentioned by name. It is from this point of recognition that Jim is free to search for himself, and to find it eventually many years later, in the land and in Antonia.

In Book IV which is largely second-hand narrative of Antonia, her seduction and the birth of her baby, Jim's cultural and intellectual life at Harvard is developing in a direction away from Antonia's.⁶⁰ But this is no longer of importance and the narrative returns to Antonia without reference to a wider world. In Book V, Jim's return to the land is also temporary; he judges now not from a rural but from an urban viewpoint and he comes to the point where he is able to have the best of both worlds. Yet there is in Book V an element of questioning, a posing

of the problem which Carl Lindstrum solved so easily and without effort in Alaska. Is the cultural narrowness of country life adequate for a man who has been brought up in town? While in "Neighbour Rosicky" Cather will say yes, that the love of the land is complete in itself, here she questions her conclusion in the character of Cuzack whose experience is wider than the prairies, and who yearns for the old life, reading the news in the illustrated Bohemian papers and attending the circus and dances in town. Jim describes Cuzack as looking always side-wise "as a work-horse does at its yokemate" (358) yet he has become this as a result of rural life, for he is in truth a "city man": "He liked theatres and lighted streets and music. . . to live day by day and night by night, sharing in the excitement of the crowd" (366). And Jim asks "whether the life that was right for one was ever right for two!" (367). For Cuzack is "the instrument of Ántonia's special mission" (367); unlike Jim he has had to make the choice between culture and the land, and there is a suggestion that he has chosen wrong.⁶¹

Nevertheless, this point is introduced and then rather quickly evaded, and My Ántonia concludes with Jim's triumphant affirmation of Nature and the Land; "the Road of Destiny" and "the incommunicable past".

Man and Religion: "a hunger for colour" (174).

If in religion, seeking is find and desire achieves complete fulfillment, as Myra Henshawe affirms in My Mortal Enemy,⁶² then in My Ántonia Willa Cather finds her religion in nature: "I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything any more. . . .

That is complete happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great" (18). Apart from this pantheistic naturalism which parallels the death of the two lovers in O Pioneers!, religion plays little role in My Ántonia and its significance is considerably less than in its predecessor. The Catholic elements in the life of the Shimerdas are minimized, and although the young Ántonia has the vivacity of Marie and her Bohemian background, the relation of this to her Catholic inheritance is only apparent to those who realize Cather's common association of this vitality with Catholicism. Indeed Catholicism is continually under attack in Book I where the point-of-view is predominantly the Protestantism of the Burden grandparents. In Book II, the influence of religion is almost negligible, and Cather's attitude is predominantly negative as in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours, while after Book II it disappears almost entirely. After his discovery of literature and the theatre in Lincoln, Jim has no further need of religion, and in the end, in his return to Nature and Ántonia, he finds life complete and fulfilled without divine assistance. The novel then is predominantly concerned with the religion of nature.

Book I is almost unique in Cather's fiction in that it presents the Protestant point-of-view from a broad humanistic angle and without attack. Although Grandfather Burden is at times rather condescending in his references to Catholicism of the Shimerdas, he is remarkably tolerant and stresses "The prayers of all good people are good" (88). He disapproves of Ambrosch's payments to the priest to release Mr. Shimerda's soul from Purgatory when the family needs the money for

seed and clothing, yet he concedes that it proves Ambrosch's true faith: "If he can spare six dollars, pinched as he is, it shows he believes what he professes" (133). When Anton Jelinek tries to explain that the need for a priest is great because "their father has done a great sin", Grandfather replies "We believe that, too, Jelinek. But we believe that Mr. Shimerda's soul will come to its creator as well off without a priest. We believe that Christ is our only intercessor" (106). To Jelinek's story of carrying the sacraments to the dead and dying in a camp plagued by cholera where "we have no sickness, we have no fear, because we carry that blood and that body of Christ, and it preserve us", Grandfather replies only "I would never be the one to say you were not in God's care" (106-7) and Jim remarks rather condescendingly "It was impossible not to admire his frank, manly faith" (107). The Burdens will not concur with Mrs. Shimerda's wish to bury her husband at a point where future roads will cross over the grave of the suicide: "if she thinks she will live to see the people of this country ride over that old man's head, she is mistaken" (114). And although Mr. Shimerda is buried here, when the road is built the grave is left, an island of red grass in the centre of the divided highway. Apart from Grandfather Burden, the most religious figure of the novel is Ambrosch, and the description of him is not admirable, for he is sullen, grasping, selfish, even in his devotion:

He was deeply, even slavishly, devout. He did not say a word all morning, but sat with his rosary in his hands, praying, now silently, now aloud. He never looked away from his beads, nor lifted his hands except to cross himself. (99)

Jake comments that Ambrosch shows more human feeling for his father than

would be expected of him, but Ambrosch's chief concern is to find a priest for he believes that his father's soul is in torment and will remain in Purgatory for several years. It is Jim who denies this emphatically, although he does not admit that he believed Mr. Shimerda to have been with him in the kitchen that afternoon. But he considers the Catholic idea of Purgatory and rejects it with certainty:

After I went to bed, this idea of Punishment and Purgatory came back on me crushingly. I remembered the account of Dives in torment, and shuddered. But Mr. Shimerda had not been rich and selfish; he had only been so unhappy that he could not live any longer. (103)

Yet despite this broad humanism, the emphasis of Book I suggests that Protestantism is the true faith, an emphasis which may be related closely to Cather's own memories of her youth and of her Grandfather Cather, the original of Grandfather Burden, whom Bennett describes: "Earnest but domineering, he maintained the patriarchal ideal of family life".⁶³ While Grandfather prays over the grave of Shimerda in the absence of a priest, asking forgiveness for him and for all those who have been unkind to him as a stranger, for understanding and help for the widow and children and for mercy and grace under judgement, Grandmother Burden asks Otto to start a hymn after the prayer because "it would seem less heathenish" (118).⁶⁴ And when Mr. Shimerda kneels and crosses himself before the Christmas tree with its candles and its manger scene Jim adds "Grandfather merely put his finger-tips to his brow and bowed his venerable head, thus Protestantizing the atmosphere" (87).

In Book II, religion becomes of little importance to Jim and its

influence is almost totally negative. Perhaps this too reflects Cather's changing attitude to her Grandfather. When Jim hears Tiny observe that Grandmother Burden is "going to make a Baptist preacher" of him, teasing "I guess you'll have to stop dancing and wear a white necktie then. Won't he look funny, girls?" (215), he becomes extremely angry: "I said I was going to be whatever I pleased. 'Won't you be surprised, Miss Tiny, if I turn out to be a regular devil of a fellow?'" (216). Although the Burdens are now increasingly concerned with Church life, Grandfather becoming a Deacon and Grandmother "busy with church suppers and missionary societies" (145) the effect on Jim is considerably diminished and largely one of restriction. Anton Jelinek explains that it is not fair to Grandfather for Jim to spend his evenings in the saloon of which Grandfather disapproves: "You know how the church people think about saloons. Your grandpa has always treated me fine, and I don't like to have you come into my place, because I know he don't like it" (218). Although Grandfather does not approve of dancing, he would consent to Jim's dancing among "the people we knew" (220). But Jim prefers the hired girls and deceives his grandparents, escaping to the Firemen's Hall to dance with them and Grandmother reproaches him "it ain't right to deceive us, son, and it brings blame on us. People say you are growing up to be a bad boy, and that ain't just to us" (227). And so Jim stays home in the evenings and studies Latin in preparation for university. After this, almost all reference to religion ceases.

The only appeal of the Church for Jim seems to be aesthetic, and even the importance of art in religion is almost absent in My

Antonia. Passing by the Black Hawk Methodist church on cold winter evenings, Jim remarks:

How glad I was when there happened to be a light in the church, and the painted glass window shone out at us as we came along the frozen street. In the winter bleakness a hunger for colour came over the people, like the Laplander's craving for fats and sugar. Without knowing why, we used to linger on the sidewalk outside the church when the lamps were lighted early for choir-practice or prayer-meeting, shivering and talking until our feet were like lumps of ice. The crude reds and greens and blues of that coloured glass held us there. (174)

The connection of this experience to the warmth and colour of the Harling lights which "drew me like the painted glass" (174) indicates that this experience is not truly religious in nature but social and aesthetic.⁶⁵ The only other passage which suggests a religious ritual is that scene of the Christmas celebration in Book I, a scene almost unique in Cather's fiction since the pagan associations of warmth and security against the cold, of gaiety and comradeship, of good food and celebration, are here shared with the devotional aspects of Christmas.⁶⁶ The Christmas breakfast of waffles and sausages is preceded by Grandfather Burden's prayer of thanks for the first Christmas, and its meaning for the world today, for the poor people in cities and suffering hardships. The Christmas tree has been decorated with home-made decorations and a manger scene from Otto's trunk, with a baby in the manger, three kings, the shepherds, the ox and ass, and camels and leopards to attend the kings. To Grandmother Burden, the tree becomes a "Tree of Knowledge" for it seems to encompass legends and stories from life, fairy tales and all human sources (83). But it is only in the arrival of Mr. Shimerda that the tree takes on its real meaning as

ritual:

When the candle-ends sent up their conical yellow flames, all the coloured figures from Austria stood out clear and full of meaning against the green boughs. Mr. Shimerda rose, crossed himself, and quietly knelt down before the tree, his head sunk forward. . . . There had been nothing strange about the tree before, but now, with some one kneeling before it--images, candles. . . Grandfather merely put his finger-tips to his brow and bowed his venerable head, thus Protestantizing the atmosphere. (87)

But before he leaves, Anton Shimerda bends over grandmother's hand, and then makes the sign of the cross over Jim, to go off into the darkness of death.

The Church appears nowhere in Books III and IV and only once in Book V where young Ambrosch Cuzack remarks that Leo is "jealous of anybody mother makes a fuss over, even the priest" (368) and Jim observes that Leo has inherited that "habitual scepticism" of Mrs. Shimerda who once reminded him that his grandfather "wasn't Jesus" (350). In the fulfillment of Eden, religion is unnecessary. Jim has found himself in the fertility of *Ántonia's* garden, with its ducks and geese, its yellow pumpkins and white cats and the "veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight" (330, 339). And he returns to his early response to Nature in the Burden garden amid the pumpkins: "I did not want to be anything any more. . . . That is complete happiness" (18).

Once again, the Novel returns to the Land, as the end of the quest for meaning through art and religion. *My Ántonia* stands then as Cather's most successful statement of man's relationship to the order of Nature, a relationship which no longer excludes human love and family

integration or substitutes natural order for human life. Yet the novel ends in stasis. After My Ántonia there is nowhere to go. For while Jim has solved his dilemma, Cather herself is still seeking. In her next novels, One of Ours and A Lost Lady, she turns again to the West but she resumes the attack on the West as culturally sterile which she has begun in her early short stories "The Sculptor's Funeral" and "A Wagner Matinée". The Land is no longer a Sanctuary for it is no longer unchanging, a constant pole for the artist. And there is no future except to attack those who have made it what it is, who have destroyed it and drained the marshes for commercial exploitation.

4. "NEIGHBOUR ROSICKY"

"Neighbour Rosicky", written in 1930 after the completion of Death Comes for the Archbishop and during Shadows on the Rock, is a late and rather surprising return to the treatment of nature and man's relationship to the land with which Cather has been concerned in O Pioneers! and My Ántonia. While the late novels find the fulfilment of longing and desire in religion and the stability of a past order, both political and religious, "Neighbour Rosicky" returns to the security of nature which Jim finds in the Burden garden:

The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. . . . Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.¹

Although the early novels do present death as a part of life, it is always a vicarious experience for the central character, part of his process of development. In The Professor's House, Cather faces death more directly as part not only of our environment but of our own experience. And this experience can be interpreted only through a closer approach to the pattern of nature:

[The Professor] was a primitive. He was interested only in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned, and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. . . . He was earth and would return to earth.²

The Professor himself returns to life and society, but Cather

has here touched upon the theme of "Neighbour Rosicky", the effectual denial of death for a merging of man with nature.

The seed for "Neighbour Rosicky" seems to have been Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's article on the conditions of Italians in New York tenements. As Managing Editor of McClure's Magazine, Cather read this article and commented to Miss Sergeant:

She confessed that my piece did make her low in her mind. In her Nebraska country Europeans from Northern or Central Europe were surely hard-driven. Most of them were handworkers to start with. And some failed and came to grief from drought or mortgages. But they were at ease in space and time, many laboured, many prospered, and the corn and wheat sprang up and the girls grew along with the grain in the furrows.

But Italian peasants in New York--what a harsh fate--what an incredible anomaly.³

Cather here makes the same assumption that she later makes in "Neighbour Rosicky", that life on the land in harmony with nature is more rewarding, more fulfilling, than the life of art and culture in the city. This becomes the central theme, in fact the thesis, of "Neighbour Rosicky". While both Carl and Jim Burden ultimately turn back to the land, the case for the city is at least presented and in actuality Jim remains in the city, finding in Antonia and the land only one pole of his life. In "Neighbour Rosicky", however, nature becomes a sanctuary like the rock of the Acomas, preserving man from evil and even sheltering him from experience. Thus "Neighbour Rosicky" is the purest and most succinct expression of Nature as Eden and man as Adam before the Fall. In Nature man finds all his good, and in death he achieves the end of desire, the transcendence of the physical body and its union with the earth from which it comes.⁴

Man's relationship to nature Cather presents first as a simple

and inborn response to man's historic and natural environment:

[Rosicky had] formed those ties with the earth and the farm, animals and growing things which are never made at all unless they are made early. . . . To work on another man's farm would be all he asked; to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow. He was a very simple man. He was like a tree that has not many roots, but one tap-root that goes down deep. (32)⁵

In this sense, cities are alien since "they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground" (31). Even death has meaning in connection with the natural environment, and passing by the graveyard after the doctor has told him of his heart condition, Rosicky muses on its relation to natural order and the pattern of agricultural life:

It was a nice graveyard, Rosicky reflected, sort of snug and homelike, not cramped or mournful,--a big sweep all around it. A man could lie down in the long grass and see the complete arch of the sky over him, hear the wagons go by; in summer the mowing machine rattled right up to the wire fence. And it was so near home. (18)

The implied contrast between city and country is made explicit by Doctor Ed after the death of Rosicky:

He thought of city cemeteries; acres of shubbery and heavy stone, so arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world. Cities of the dead, indeed; cities of the forgotten, of the "put away". But this was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind for ever stirred. (71)

The action of the story is concerned with Rosicky's preparation for the acceptance of death, and his assessment of his experience of life which he passes on to his sons. This experience asserts the superiority of the country life over the life of the city: "the worst they could do on the farm was better than the best they would be likely to do in the city" (60). This conclusion seems to be borne out

by Rosicky's argument, but in actuality it is proved by Rosicky's narrative art. To him, the city conveys London with its dirty crowds and flea-ridden lodgings, its starved boys staring hungrily into shop windows laden with Christmas goods, or New York with its stone and asphalt jungles, its blank windows and its cold buildings like empty jails (30-1). The country is the rich and fertile American West, free and open under an arching blue sky. In the fifth section Rosicky juxtaposes these two views in his two narratives: the one of Christmas in London where he steals the roast goose from the hungry family to satisfy his own hunger, and then begs money to replace it; and the story of the Fourth of July picnic when the Rosickys feast on hot biscuit, plums, roast chicken and grape wine while the corn roasts under the sun and the year's crop shrivels in the fields.⁶ By the choice of season and detail, Cather associates the Old World with cold, poverty and starvation, and the New World with summer, warmth, fertility and plenty even in times of hardship. The old world conveys loneliness and isolation; the new, family relationships and love.

But the separation of the Old World and the New, the urban and the rural, is not only physical but moral, a separation between good and evil based on the romanticized view of nature as restorative and the city as corrupt:

It seemed to Rosicky that for good, honest boys like his, the worst they could do on the farm was better than the best they would be likely to do in the city. If he'd had a mean boy, now, one who was crooked and sharp and tried to put anything over on his brothers, then town would be the place for him. (60)

The implication is that such a boy would take his rightful place in

a corrupted society. The city breeds evil and cultivates it, corrupting the poor and unfortunate to steal or to commit crimes in order to preserve their own lives, as in the case of Rosicky himself, and furthering the designs of those already corrupt, the Wick Cutters, Bayliss Wheelers and Ivy Peters:

In the city, all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbours was part of your life. The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human,--depraved and poisonous specimens of man. . . . There were mean people everywhere, to be sure, even in their own country town here. But they weren't tempered, hardened, sharpened, like the treacherous people in cities who live by gringing or cheating or poisoning their fellow men. (59-60)

Thus Rosicky's sons are sheltered by his dogmatism from facing the issue for themselves in order to retain their natural innocence which is their country inheritance: they are sheltered not only from evil but even from experience. The suffering and purgation which has been stressed in O Pioneers! and My Ántonia as a necessary preparation for the return to Paradise, is now denied, and they are to find in life only physical comfort, beauty and a general and unspecified happiness in idyllic human relationships:

What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the World without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings. "Their mother and me ain't prepared them for that", he sometimes said to himself. (60)⁷

The argument is emotional rather than logical, and the turning-point of the narrative occurs when Rosicky narrates his story of the Christmas goose, and thus gains the attention of Polly, his city-born daughter-in-law. Here Polly first decides to have Rudolph's family to supper, although she has been ashamed of them before, and after Rosicky's attack, she cries "Lean on me, Father, hard" (63).

Although Rosicky's success in persuading Polly to stay on the land may not seem significant or even convincing, it is actually a triumphant conversion from city to country, and is sealed by Polly's announcement of the coming child who will inherit Rosicky's land.

Rosicky's approaching death is important in the action, since it provides a point from which to look back over the past and to assess the meaning of man's existence, as the reunion with Antonia does for Jim. Where the pattern of the seasons has been important in ordering Jim's experience and in indicating his maturation, the seasonal pattern of "Neighbour Rosicky" becomes not merely the structuring agent of the novel but the structuring agent of life. And while My Antonia moves from summer to summer, "Neighbour Rosicky" moves from winter, through spring and death, to summer and rebirth, in accord with the vegetation myth.⁸ Rosicky's journey home from the office of the doctor where he has learned of his approaching death represents his "journey through the world" (59). Here he looks down upon the graveyard where he will soon lie under the grass:

Over yonder on the hill he could see his own house, crouching low, with the clump of orchard behind and the windmill before, and all down the gentle hillslope the rows of pale gold cornstalks stood out against the white field. The snow was falling over the cornfield and the pasture, and the hay-land, steadily, with very little wind,--a nice dry snow. The graveyard had only a light wire fence about it and was all overgrown with long red grass. The fine snow, settling into this red grass and upon the few little evergreens and the headstones, looked very pretty. . . . The snow, falling over his barnyard and the graveyard, seemed to draw things together like. And they were all old neighbours in the graveyard, most of them friends. . . . [The snow] meant rest for vegetation and men and beasts, for the ground itself; a season of long nights for sleep, leisurely breakfasts, peace by the fire. (17-19)

Rosicky lives quietly through the winter, in preparation for death.

His main purpose now is to concentrate on the future of his family, his sons; "now he was trying to find what he wanted for his boys, and why it was he so hungered to feel sure they would be here, working this very land, after he was gone" (58). His success is indicated not only in Polly's decision to invite Rudolph's parents for dinner, but in her confidence to Rosicky of the coming child, the third generation on the land. Rosicky dies in effect to save the land for this child; he goes out to weed the alfalfa fields of thistles, in spite of the warning of Doctor Ed, and his death is a direct result. Thus he sacrifices his life to save the crop, the symbol both of his own youth in the Old World and of his sons' continuing relationship to the land (62). And he is buried in the land, to rise like Adonis or Ceres in the form of the summer hay and alfalfa. The final description of his grave by Doctor Ed suggests ultimately life rather than death:

Close by the wire fence stood Rosicky's mowing machine, where one of the boys had been cutting hay that afternoon; his own work-horses had been going up and down there. The new-cut hay perfumed all the night air. The moonlight silvered the long billowy grass that grew over the graves and hid the fence; the few little evergreens stood out black in it, like the shadows in a pool. The sky was very blue and soft, the stars rather faint because the moon was full. . . . Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met the sky. The horses worked here in summer; the neighbours passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as the winter came on. Nothing could be more undeathlike than this place. . . . Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful. (70-1).

Here Cather accepts the Romantic philosophy of death as a merging of man with the natural universe. Like Wordsworth's Lucy, "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course/With rocks and stones and trees"⁹ or Shelley's

Adonais who is "made one with Nature. . . a portion of the loveliness/ Which once he made more lovely"¹⁰, Rosicky takes his place in the universe of Nature beyond death.

Rosicky's rejection of art for nature is significant, for Rosicky is clearly an artist-figure although he is a craftsman rather than a creator. A tailor in London and New York, he is skilful also at carpentering and has the hand of the artist (67). With his best friend, a cabinet-maker, he plays the flute in the evenings in New York and enjoys the culture of the Big City, attending the opera and buying standing-room on Saturday nights to satisfy his childlike love of the theatrical, the "stage splendour, the costumes, the ballet" (28). After, he and several friends would find a small place for beer and oysters. Or he would spend money on good dinners, beer, tobacco and the girls. His love of this good life he explains: "It gave a fellow something to think about for the rest of the week" (27).

For a time he finds this culture satisfying; his life seemed complete and he "thought he wanted to live like that for ever" (29). Yet he finds his hunger for the land denied by the city, and he turns away from New York for Omaha, never to return. Cuzack of My Antonia, modelled on the same original, does not lose his yearning for city life and tells Jim that he has been tempted to run away from the farm:

He was still. . . a city man. He liked theatres and lighted streets and music and a game of dominoes after the day's work was over. His sociability was stronger than his acquisitive instinct. He liked to live day by day and night by night, sharing in the excitement of the crowd. . . . This was a fine life, certainly, but it wasn't the kind of life he had wanted to live.¹¹

The idealized Rosicky evades these problems; indeed he precludes his

sons' enjoyment of the very experiences he has valued in New York.¹² Their only counterpart in the country is the movies to which Rosicky sends Rudolph and Polly on Saturday nights, and even the music of the church choir and the piano to which Polly is accustomed have no place here.

In earlier days this cultural shallowness would have been attacked or exposed as in "The Sculptor's Funeral" or "Wagner Matinée". Here it is ignored, and there is no sense of loss or of incompatibility. Thus Cather comes finally and completely to accept that man can fulfill all his desires in nature alone. In observing the cycle of the seasons, in planting and growing and reaping, he can merge his identity with nature and become part of the harmony of the universe.

The treatment of religion per se does not appear at all in "Neighbour Rosicky". Although presumably Rosicky and his family are Catholic, since they are Bohemian and based on the husband and family of Annie Pavelka like the Cuzacks, there is no reference to the church at all except in connection with Polly's family who sing in their local choir. There is even no reference to a priest or minister: "Here, if you were sick, you had Doctor Ed to look after you; and if you died, fat Mr. Haycock, the kindest man in the world, buried you" (60). For a novelist who has recently completed a work on the life of two Catholic priests and who is now engaged in research on life in early Catholic Quebec, the omission is significant, and indicates Cather's approach to nature in the story as complete in itself, without need for either art or religion.

But if we extend the term religion to include humanism, then

"Neighbour Rosicky" is among Cather's significant works of religion. For the relationships of the Rosicky family, while idealized and romantic in that they deny any real problems, do convey effectively certain tensions which exist within family units. And although these tensions may seem to be resolved too easily, their resolution lies in the power and personality of Rosicky himself.¹³

The conflict between Rosicky and Polly arises partly from the different backgrounds of the European immigrant and the native American, partly from the difference between the city-bred and the country-dweller. We have been prepared for Rosicky's victory over Polly through observing his personal charm and his love for human nature in his associations with Doctor Ed and with Pearl, the little salesgirl in the General Store. He buys candy for his women-folk and treats his children with "a grandfather's indulgence" (89). It is Rosicky who understands that Polly may be discontented in the country and who takes the young couple the family car so that they can go to the movies on Saturday night: "Polly ain't lookin' so good. I don't like to see nobody lookin' sad. It comes hard fur a town girl to be a farmer's wife" (34). His conversion of Polly to country life is achieved partially through the story of the Christmas goose and of his hardships in London and New York in his youth, but more truly through his understanding. Even before this incident, Polly's hostility is broken at times:

That kind reassuring grip on her elbows, the old man's funny bright eyes, made Polly want to drop her head on his shoulder for a second. . . . As she turned round to him, her hand fell naturally into his, and he stood holding it and smiling into her face with his peculiar, knowing, indulgent smile without a shadow of reproach in it. (37)

And after his attack in the alfalfa field, Polly is sitting with him and has a sudden insight into the nature of his power:

He was looking at her so intently and affectionately and confidently; his eyes seemed to caress her face, to regard it with pleasure. . . . She had a sudden feeling that nobody in the world, not her mother, not Rudolph, or anyone, really loved her as much as old Rosicky did. . . . It was as if Rosicky had a special gift for loving people, something that was like an ear for music or an eye for colour. It was quiet, unobtrusive; it was merely there. You saw it in his eyes,--perhaps that was why they were merry. You felt it in his hands, too. After he dropped off to sleep, she sat holding his warm, broad, flexible brown hand. . . . It seemed to her that she had never learned so much about life from anything as from old Rosicky's hand. It brought her to herself; it communicated some direct and untranslatable message. (65-7)

This message of Rosicky's hand is life, and the story presents the triumph of life over death. The revelation of the coming child to Rosicky alone links the dying man with the unborn grandchild who will bear his name and inherit his land. And so in the natural cycle, life is replaced by death and death gives way to life. Love produces and creates anew, and the vegetation cycle of death and rebirth is repeated in the human cycle of the generations on the land.

In 1923, despite the pessimism of One of Ours, Cather still had hopes that man could find himself again in the land, as she suggested in her essay "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle":

[At the graveyards of the Norsks and Bohemians] I have always the hope that something went into the ground with those pioneers that will one day come out again. Something that will come out not only in sturdy traits of character, but in elasticity of mind, in an honest attitude toward the realities of life, in certain qualities of feeling and imagination. . . . It is in that great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West that we may hope to see the hard molds of provincialism broken up; that we may hope to find young talent which will challenge the pale pro-

prieties, the insincere conventional optimism of our art and thought. . . . The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is till there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspire respect, compel admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. They can look out over those broad stretches of fertility and say: "We made this with our back and hands."¹⁴

Yet she does not completely despair: perhaps the next generation will "go back to the old sources of culture and wisdom".¹⁵ This essay indicates Cather's increasing despair for the land as a "source of culture and wisdom" for the young men of the future. "Their fathers came into the wilderness and had to make everything, had to be as ingenious as shipwrecked sailors. The generation now in the driver's seat hates to make anything. . . . They want to buy everything ready-made".¹⁶

Yet the essay indicates more; it summarizes Cather's view of these pioneers and of their essential qualities: elasticity of mind, realism, feeling and imagination to challenge proprieties, individualism, endurance and sturdiness in the face of struggle, and above all, creativity. These qualities are associated in particular with the immigrants, whom Cather preferred. She had said of Olive Fremstad in her article "Three American Singers": "Mme Fremstad is the most interesting kind of American. . . . She was born in Stockholm, Sweden; her mother was a Swede, her father a Norwegian".¹⁷ As Kazin suggests, the prairie culture in the midst of which she had lived did not seem at all rootless but rather "permanence in the midst of change":

Unconsciously, perhaps, the immigrants came to symbolize a tradition, and that tradition anchored her and gave her an almost

religious belief in its sanctity. Growing up in a period of violent disruption and social change, she was thus brought up at the same time to a homely traditionalism. Later she was to elegize it, as all contemporary American was to elegize the tradition of pioneer energy and hardihood; but only because it gave her mind an image of abiding order and--what so few have associated with the pioneer tradition--of humanism. . . . What she loved in the pioneer tradition was human qualities rather than institutions. . . . but as those qualities seemed to disappear from the national life she began to think of them as something more than personal traits; they became the principles which she was to oppose to contemporary dissolution.¹⁸

Thus as she saw these values passing, she became intensely nostalgic for she felt these values to be central to civilization.

Yet her search for order in Nature is not unlike her search in Art and Religion. While the modern descendents of the pioneer are no longer idealists, engaged in the struggle to see life clearly and to conquer their environment for the sake of their ideals, the true artist still lives in a world apart from commercialization and industry. He is engaged in the search for an ideal which is ultimately infinite because it is ultimately unattainable. Yet in this search he finds himself; as Cather says in the Preface to The Song of the Lark: "Success is never so interesting as struggle--not even to the successful" (v). And in the Order of Art she renewed her search for "beauty, order and heroic action" in the modern world.¹⁹

PART II: THE ORDER OF ART

5. INTRODUCTION

Art and the Romantic Tradition

Art is not thought or emotion, but expression, always expression. To keep an idea living, intact, tinged with all its original feeling, its original mood, preserving in it all the ecstasy which attended its birth . . . and transfer it on paper a living thing with color, odor, sound, life all in it, that is what art means, that is the greatest of all gifts of the gods.¹

Although Willa Cather summarizes her theory of art in an article written for the Journal in 1896, fully fifteen years before the publication of her first novel and nine years before her first collection of short stories, the statement in itself is interesting for it indicates the basic premises which Cather has formulated concerning the meaning and intention of art, and her dependence for her very existence as an artist upon the Romantic movement in its later manifestations. For Cather's art is predominantly romantic, not only in its theory of art as expression, but in its techniques, its purposes, and its view of society and the role of the artist in this society.²

Specifically rejecting Johnson's demand that art should teach a moral lesson, Cather insists that art should be directed not towards an audience but towards the formulating in the artist himself of his

own problem. In line with the Art-for-Art's-sake school of Pater and Wilde, she remarked in the Courier in February 1899, "the best art is that done purely for art's sake, not for God or home or native land".³ In its extreme form, this theory is expressed by MacLeish's statement: "A poem should not mean/But be".⁴ Yet Cather's central concern here is not really for art as an end in itself; she is attacking the use of art to reform society, and in particular the "muck-raking" school of art:

In a work of art intrinsic beauty is the raison d'être. Any piece of art is its own excuse for being. . . . An artist should have no moral purpose in mind other than just his art. His mission is not to clean the Augean stables; he had better join the Salvation Army if he wants to do that.⁵

Rather the artist creates for us "those things which we see everyday, which only a master can force us to regard seriously",⁶ a statement which suggests Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi":

We're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted--better to us, 7
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that.

In a later essay "Escapism", Cather states that artists are useful, not because they can deal with the social and industrial routine or help improve the living conditions of New York--they frequently cannot manage their own budget and Schubert could not keep himself in shirts--

but because they "refresh and recharge the spirit of those who can read their language",⁸ a modern phrasing of Wordsworth's "produce and enlarge the capability of being excited".

Yet Cather herself does conceive of art in ethical terms, and her later theory of the purpose of art is more in accord with the statements of modern aestheticians such as Collingwood who remarks that art moves not to arouse emotions but to express these and so come to understand them⁹; the artist in Collingwood's phrase is "a person who comes to know himself, to know his own emotion. This is also knowing his words, the sights and sounds and so forth which together make up his imaginative experience"¹⁰:

One paints a thing in order to see it. . . . A good painter--any good painter will tell you the same--paints things because until he has painted them he doesn't know what they are like.¹¹

Lewis Mumford advances a similar theory in his statement: "Art arises out of man's need to create for himself. . . a meaningful and valuable world; his need to dwell on, to intensify, and to project in more permanent forms those precious parts of his experience that would otherwise slip too quickly out of his grasp".¹² The theory is not new, but this element of art has received emphasis in recent aesthetic criticism. Beebe's definition of art in his Ivory Towers and Sacred

Founts as "an attempt to capture and imprison subjective time within the form of art"¹³ is thus anticipated in Cather's remark on fiction in Not Under Forty: "Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present, it must select the eternal matter of art",¹⁴ and even before this in The Song of the Lark: "What was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself".¹⁵

Cather's choice of theme and subject, too, is clearly romantic: her emphasis upon youth and its intense feelings, her love of nature and the earth as opposed to urban life with its hectic pace and its materialism, her absorption in the past, the faraway or exotic and the nostalgia which accompanies it, her interest in the common folk and their culture, her preoccupation with the problems of the artist as opposed to society around, even her philosophical mysticism which searches for the meaning of life through conventional religion and ultimately finds an answer not in God, but in the powers and forces behind nature, and the human universe.

Although Cather specifically rejects emotion as the object of poetry, it occupies a central place in her fiction; like Wordsworth's poetry, her novels frequently record "the spontaneous overflow of

powerful feelings" or "emotion recollected in tranquility".¹⁶ Chase quotes Cather's comment "I can't write plots. . . . I don't see life in terms of action. Persons like me who see it in terms of thought and imagery would best keep away from suspense. It's design they want, not conflict".¹⁷ Here Cather recognizes that her field lies not in suspense and physical interaction, but rather in something which underlies these, something which later she can describe as the interrelationship of characters and conflicts which are submerged and often psychological or spiritual. Her choice of "thought" and "imagery" to describe this is perhaps misleading, for her handling of both thought and imagery hinge on mood and the recreation of emotion.¹⁸ In "Light on Adobe Walls", she indicates that the artist cannot capture real forms but only their reflections on human emotion:

Nobody can paint the sun or sunlight. He can only paint the tricks that shadows play with it, or what it does to forms. . . . He can only paint some emotion they give him, . . . the projection in paint of a fleeting pleasure in a certain combination of form and colour, as temporary and almost as physical as a taste on the tongue.¹⁹

The dramatist or poet cannot capture emotions directly, she continues:

"No poet can write of love, hate, jealousy. He can only touch these things as they affect the people in his drama and his story".²⁰ Yet

the effect of these emotions is the central concern for the great

writer like Katharine Mansfield, who conveys the tragic web of family and social relationships underlying our everyday life and activity, and defining our real life, our basic happiness or unhappiness.²¹

Ultimately for Cather, then, the basic requirement of art is stated in terms of its emotional effect on an audience, an effect which demands not only an immediate but a long-term response, retained by the memory as a form of experience and defined by Cather in musical terms as a "cadence":

Walter Pater said that every truly great drama must, in the end, linger in the reader's mind as a sort of ballad. One might say that every fine story must leave in the mind of the sensitive reader an intangible residuum of pleasure; a cadence, a quality of voice that is excusively the writer's own, individual, unique. A quality which one can. . . experience over and over again in the mind but can never absolutely define, as one can experience in memory a melody, or the summer perfume of a garden.²²

And in "The Novel D  meubl  " she stresses again the predominance of emotion in the judgement of art and creation:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there--that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.²³

In context, this statement is made as a contrast to naturalism and to the cataloguing school of objects and of physical sensations, which she considers a form of journalism. Balzac is noted for his depiction of human attributes: "greed and avarice and ambition and

vanity and lost innocence of heart", not by his attempt to "reproduce on paper the actual city of Paris";²⁴ in contrast the material details of Tolstoi are selected to reveal the qualities of the characters:

The clothes, the dishes, the haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses, are always so much a part of the emotions of the people that they are perfectly synthesized; they seem to exist, not so much in the author's mind, as in the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves. . . . It is merely part of the experience.²⁵

Cather's theory of technique too is recognizably Romantic, not only in its origins but also in its application to specific works. Keats' remark in his letter to John Taylor "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all,"²⁶ is expressed in different metaphor in Cather's Preface to Alexander's Bridge, where she affirms that the real author finds his work already moulded and working will only destroy; he must rely on instinct as "our feet find the road home on a dark night."²⁷ This belief is evident as early as O Pioneers! where she describes to Sergeant the coming together of the two different plots, "The White Mulberry Tree" and the story of Alexandra Bergson as:

a sudden inner explosion and enlightenment. . . the explosion seemed to bring with it the inevitable shape that is not plotted but designs itself. She now believed that the least possible tinkering with the form--revealed from within, the better.²⁸

Like Conrad who remarked "I cannot meddle to any purpose with what is

within me . . . with what has got itself written",²⁹ Cather shaped her works from within. Lewis tells us that she began a novel like a journey. Although she had determined her direction and her destination, she did not know herself, often, what she would write for she never plotted scenes or incidents ahead. She wrote the first draft of the work with great speed and made no changes in it: "She depended on the force of her ideas and her feeling to create the pattern of her story as she went along".³⁰ Cather herself describes this process elsewhere:

Always the end was seen from the beginning, and in each case it was the end that I set out to reach . . . the feeling of the end, the mood. . . . But practically everything beside the central purpose or the central feeling comes spontaneously and unexpectedly, though they all grow out of the main theme and out of the feeling and experience that made me choose that theme.³¹

In her essay on Sarah Orne Jewett, she defines "style" as a "very personal quality of perception, a vivid and intensely personal experience of life" which is achieved "when the quality of feeling comes inevitably out of the theme itself; when the language, the stresses, the very structure of the sentences are imposed upon the writer by the special mood of the piece."³² Gradually in her development, the presence of the author, describing and selecting, becomes muted so that by One of Ours she comments:

Form seemed to assume greater significance. . . . Writing should be so lost in the object that it doesn't exist for the reader.

Self-consciousness was a mistake--the writer should be just an eye and an ear.³³

In Alexander's Bridge she had explained that she was enlightened about form "in flashes that are as unreasoning, often unreasonable, as life itself", and she explained to Sergeant that the decisive element in her creativity was not either mind or invention but "intuitive, poetical, almost mystical perception".³⁴ Sergeant comments elsewhere that this creative force is mysterious and largely beyond conscious control like an iceberg which is almost submerged. Although she was aware of this force in operation, she was not fully in control of it:

She moved in her own powerful, inflexible direction, impervious to many aspects of life that to others might be significant. She knew when she was in motion, at least, and when she was jostled and churned up from below by meeting, usually through memory, a figure she could not deny. Then she paused, gazed, apprehended her fullest inwardly and communicated in a story what she saw and felt.³⁵

Finally, Cather's whole concept of the artist is Romantic and follows the cult of the artist which emerges in the late eighteenth century. It is generally true to say that before 1800 the poet was not alienated from the community because of his art. It is with Byron and Shelley, notes one critic, that we find "the modern popular stereotype of the artist as an iconoclastic, maladjusted, highly individualistic person, in revolt against this age and misunderstood by family, friends,

and public alike",³⁶ or in Abrams' phrase, the "stereotype of the poète maudit, endowed with an ambiguous gift of sensibility which makes him at the same time more blessed and more cursed than the other members of a society from which he is, by the destiny of an inheritance, an outcast".³⁷ Abrams notes that Shelley had a "delicate sensibility and vulnerability to temptation" and John Stuart Mill, an inheritance of "fine senses" and:

A nervous organization. . . so constituted, as to be more easily than common organizations, thrown, either by physical or moral causes, into states of enjoyment or suffering. . . . [He must suffer] from the poetic temperament itself, under arrangements of society, made by and for harder natures.³⁸

For Cather, the sensitivity of the artist is a requisite for his art; the dramatist, the novelist, the opera singer, the painter have "the unique and marvellous experience of entering into the very skin of another human being".³⁹ For her as for Wordsworth, the artist must retain the responsiveness of the child, his sense of wonder, his openness to experience, and above all, his exuberance and vitality; adding to this the wisdom accumulated from the experience of life; "an artist is a child always",⁴⁰ yet he "must live and know and labor and endure before he can write a book that purports to tell of life"; he "cannot write a novel before he has grown a moustache".⁴¹ He combines then the vision of the child with the form and maturity of the

adult. Cather would agree with James that he requires above all "a capacity for receiving straight impressions".⁴² And he needs complete dedication: "an artist should not be vexed by human hobbies or human follies. . . . He should be among men but not of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and believe and argue, but he must create".⁴³

The isolation of the artist in society is the result of these differences, for society to Cather means Philistia, a world of non-art which not only does not understand the ideals of the artist but deliberately opposes him. This primary opposition between the "chosen" or elite and the bourgeois community is accentuated by the increasingly industrial and commercial preoccupations of society, its interest in mass-production, standardization and collectivization which the artist refutes, stimulating his dedication to the imagination and the ideal.

At first Cather attacks American society, particularly the expanding West for its cultural poverty; it is growing rapidly in physical size but not in maturity. Doctor Archie says of Wunsch, Thea's first music teacher in a little Colorado town:

He's got nothing to sell that a mining town wants to buy. Why don't those old fellows stay at home? We won't need them for another hundred years. An engine-wiper can get a job, but a piano player! Such people can't make good.⁴⁴

And in an early passage:

There are many among us who make the mistake of thinking that we are an artistic people. . . . We can build excellent bridges, we can put up beautiful office buildings, factories, in time, it may be, we shall be known for the architecture which our peculiar industrial progress has fostered here, but literary art, painting, sculpture, no. We haven't yet acquired the good sense of discrimination possessed by the French for instance. They have a great purity of tradition.⁴⁵

In both passages Cather emphasises the "yet" and contrasts to America Europe or Paris and "the tranquillity of an old, comprehensible civilization".⁴⁶ The French people, she says in a comment on Sergeant's recent sketches on France, have "values, aims, a point of view, and have acquired wisdom from the enduring verities. One did not find anything of that sort in the Middle West".⁴⁷

But her early critical remarks also stress certain aspects of mid-western American culture which become more prominent in her fiction after 1922. In 1895 she has remarked in the Journal that America has no art of its own, no innate desire to create which has revealed itself in most countries and most societies:

Yes, America is a strange country. It doesn't make, but it buys. Having no very great painters it buys all the greatest pictures in the world. Having no poets it is the first to recognize and honor the poets of other countries. Having no Paderewski, no Calvé, no Melba, it hires them all, pays them so magnificently that the poor kingdoms of Europe, who gave them birth and whose tastes and traditions made their art, scarcely ever catch sight of them.⁴⁸

America is a land of commerce, not of art. And the only culture is the artificial culture of the bourgeoisie, and their wives who join clubs and play bridge and paint china. Her comments on these are acid:

About once a week the literary ladies meet together and mingle the "glories that were Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" with tea and muffins and Saratoga chips. . . . Family matters mix so strangely with Kant's philosophy or Ruskin's theory of art.⁴⁹

She refers to the Ladies Home Journal as:

That organ of exquisite literary culture. . . devoted exclusively to the interests of the great and to the unknown wives of the great; to how Henry Ward Beacher liked his mutton chops, to how Paderewski tied his shoes, to how "the Duchess" wears her back hair.⁵⁰

The art of America is the art of the mediocre. It produces on the local level Lily Fishers and on the national level Jessie Darceys who are "only Lily Fishers under another name".⁵¹ Many of the churches of Lincoln "profane the sanctuary with music that would not be endured from a musée band".⁵² And the values and standards of society are determined by middle class mores, like the boys of Sweetwater whose "conception of a really fine dinner service was one 'hand painted' by a sister or sweetheart"⁵³ and who ignore any attempts at Mrs. Forrester's dinner party to converse on culture, politics or even the state of the crop. This society forms the group of Philistines against which the chosen artists struggle for their very existence. Thea must

compete with Lily Fisher, Don Hedger with Eden Bower. Their standards of success vary, and they will never achieve an understanding.

The earlier novels suggest that the achievement of culture and art is only a process of time and education. Cather would agree with Maurice Beebe that "art is the controlling of nature and flourishes best in a highly civilized society".⁵⁴ But after My Ántonia, after 1922, Cather comes to doubt that such an education is possible in America. Claude Wheeler is killed in an ironic mood of patriotism for an already lost America; Marian Forrester turns to Ivy Peters for salvation. And the Professor comes to recognize that co-existence is the only possible solution. His wife, his family, his university, his town have all abandoned the values for which he has fought through a lifetime in his art and his career. There can be no compromise, and death will not resolve the difference; he is left to face the future of America armed only with fortitude.

Perhaps it is partially these Romantic characteristics which led to Cather's decline as an artist after 1927, for the Romantic emphasis upon emotion and the intensity of feeling for poetic vitality seems to be related to youth rather than age. Dorothy Canfield Fisher notes Cather's similarity to the poet rather than the novelist in her belief

that "the only part of life which made a real impression on her imagination and emotion was what happened to her before the age of twenty. . . . [She shares with poets] this feeling. . . that what happened to them in their youth when the emotional impact was strong and fresh and new, was much the most important part of their experience. of human life".⁵⁵ While Cather retained a youthful vision of life until her fifties, in 1922 something occurred which radically altered the direction of her art and brought about its cessation with ten years. In "Light on Adobe Walls" she suggests that art can die, and she records this process in The Professor's House. For in accord with the Romantic tradition, she sees art as "a concrete and personal and rather childish thing after all. . . a game of make-believe, of reproduction. . . too terribly human to be very 'great' perhaps".⁵⁶

"Some very great artists have outgrown. . . the game"; Tolstoi and Leonardo, perhaps Beethoven, lived past their art. And in Shakespeare's last plays, Cather suggests that there is "an awful veiled threat" in The Tempest and that Shakespeare was saved by death from age and bitterness, from "wrangling with abstractions or creeds" which Cather suggests is the fate of the dead artist.⁵⁷ Leon Edel points out that great novelists are "forever immersed in the world around. . . [which is]

constantly interesting and curious and filled with abiding truths of human character and an ever-continuing battle between good and evil"; Balzac, Dostoevsky and Henry James died with many novels yet unwritten.⁵⁸ But Cather's art depended on other factors; perhaps her essay indicates her recognition that her aging, her alienation from the present and its youth, her increasing bitterness and obsession with lost ideals, her desire for security in religion, are the product of her loss of art after Shadows on the Rock and Obscure Destinies. For she lived on, with only two novels to write and one slim book of short stores; after 1932 she is almost voiceless. She no longer has the qualities of the artist.

Cather's Art: "a sheath, a mould in which to imprison. . . life itself".⁵⁹

Hundreds of years ago, before European civilization had touched this continent, the Indian women in the old rock-perched pueblos of the Southwest were painting geometrical patterns on the jars in which they carried water up from the streams. Why did they take the trouble? These people lived under the perpetual threat of drought and famine; they often shaped their graceful cooking pots when they had nothing to cook in them. Anyone who looks over a collection of prehistoric Indian pottery dug up from the old burial mounds knows at once that the potters experimented with form and colour to gratify something that had not concern with food and shelter. The major arts (poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, music) have a pedigree all their own. They did not come into being as a means of increasing the game supply or promoting tribal superiority. They sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man.⁶⁰

This statement in her essay "Escapism" determines for Cather that the need for beauty, and for art and culture to express this beauty and shape it into form, is one of the basics of human nature which appears in all cultures and all forms of society: "Food, fire, water, and something else. . . . Down here at the beginning, that painful thing was already stirring; the seed of sorrow, and of so much delight".⁶¹

Her remark suggests Arnold's answer in "Literature and Science" to Huxley's query if science is not of more importance to the development

of the average individual than the arts: "And so we at last find, it seems. . . the 'hairy quadrupled furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits', this good fellow carried hidden in his nature, apparently, something destined to develop into a necessity for humane letters. . . [even] a necessity for Greek".⁶² Cather recognizes that art takes its place as one of the primary requisites of human nature along with food and sleep, love, birth and death. Why this need, appearing even among the Pueblo tribes in the midst of their struggle to survive the elements and their enemies, is not in evidence in modern America society, Cather does not make clear. Perhaps it can be satisfied by those things which she does not consider art; bridge, painting china, literary clubs, the Ladies' Home Journal.

The subject of the artist, whether he be a folk-artist or a master, and whether his medium is paint, clay, music, words or the ballet, is life: "Art must spring out of the very stuff that life is made of".⁶³ And the true artist expresses for us "those things which we see every day which only a master can force us to regard seriously".⁶⁴ Cather praises Sarah Orne Jewett above all because her Pointed Fir tales are "not stories at all, but life itself"⁶⁵ and her characters everyday people who "grew out of the soil".⁶⁶ Art begins as a response to beauty and to life; Cather explains that she titled The Song of the Lark after an obscure and second-rate picture in the Chicago Art Institute where "a little peasant girl, on her way to work in the fields at early morning, stops and looks up to listen to a lark", for to her the painting represents "a young girl's awakening to something beautiful".⁶⁷ But true art must move from appreciation to expression; as Cather remarked to Grant Reynard: "the great thing was desire in

art, that a desire to express ourselves be a clear, compelling thing that must out".⁶⁸ The artist selects "the eternal material of art" "out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present"⁶⁹ which awakens in him a sense of beauty or of tragedy.

In her most famous statement of the meaning of art, Cather in The Song of the Lark considers the pottery of Panther Canyon, fashioned to carry water, the precious element of life, from the stream at the base of the Canyon to the cliff-homes:

The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals.⁷⁰

Pottery, sculpture, voice: each of these like Keats' Grecian Urn and Shakespeare's sonnets are forms through which the idea expresses itself, through which the temporal is captured and made eternal.

Cather's definition of art as expression equates art with its original meaning of craft in Latin and the original meaning of the poet in Greek as poeta or maker.⁷¹ For Cather it embraces a number of areas not always commonly associated with art, such as domestic life:

The farmer's wife who raises a large family and cooks for them and makes their clothes and keeps house and on the side runs a truck garden and a chicken farm and a canning establishment, and thoroughly enjoys doing it, and doing it well, contributes more to art than all the culture clubs. Most of the women artists I have known--the prima donnas, novelists, poets, sculptors--have been women of the same type. The very best cooks I have ever known have been prima donnas The German housewife who sets before her family on Thanksgiving Day a perfectly roasted goose, is an artist. The farmer who goes out in the morning to harness his team, and pauses to admire the sunrise--he is an artist.⁷²

This identification of the housewife and the farmer with the artist is not unique to Cather. Hazlitt says of poetry that it is "the language of the imagination and the passions" and occurs "wherever there is a sense of beauty, of power, or harmony":

Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry
 [The child is a poet] when he first plays at hide-and-seek
 . . . the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow, . . .
 the miser, when he hugs his gold.⁷³

But although Cather does suggest the qualities of the artist in the child and the farmer who are open to a perception of beauty, nevertheless she does demand of art on the whole not only an expression of life but a conscious control of design or form. In this sense, she would include as arts not only ballet and the dance but tennis; both draw upon the skill of the performer who expresses his idea through rhythmic movement and action:

The ballet, for instance, interested her vitally as a balanced trial of grace, poise, muscle, and temperament in which a unique individual, the ballerina, could excel. The game of tennis fascinated her for the same reasons; she compared Suzanne Lenglen, the superb tennis star of the twenties, to Pavlova, the Russian dancer, a superlative mistress of coordination and aesthetic charm.⁷⁴

And the dance for her becomes a symbol of all art in that it is made up of two things, "a universal human impulse, and a very special and individual experience of it".⁷⁵

Finally all these arts are inter-related not only in subject and technique but also in their ability to stimulate artistic response in other fields. Thus Thea Kronberg is inspired to sing through her immersion in the life and art of the Pueblo Canyon; she tells Fred her ideas came "out of the rocks, out of the dead people. . . . They taught me the inevitable hardness of human life. No artist gets far

who doesn't know that".⁷⁶ And from the same source come Cather's novels The Song of the Lark, The Professor's House and Death Comes for the Archbishop. It is implied that Tom Outland turns to his inventions in chemistry through the inspiration of the pueblos, and certainly he links their culture with the literary tradition of Vergil and the Classics. Cather is inspired to write My Ántonia through her stimulation by Annie Pavelka, the domestic artist, O Pioneers! through her response to the art of farming, and The Song of the Lark through her love of opera and the appeal of Olive Fremstad. Many of the descriptions of the prairie in these early books seem to have been intermingled with Cather's emotional response to Dvorák's New World Symphony, described in The Song of the Lark as expressing "the reaching and reaching of high plains, the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands. . . . the amazement of a new soul in a new world".⁷⁷ Sergeant notes that for Cather herself, music was a direct source of inspiration:

Music, for Willa Cather, was hardly at all, I think, an intellectual interest. It was an emotional experience that had a potent influence on her own imaginative processes--quickenning the flow of her ideas, suggesting new forms and associations, translating itself into parallel movements of thought and feeling Her style, her beauty of cadence and rhythm, were the result of a sort of transposed musical feeling, and were arrived at almost unconsciously.⁷⁸

And Giannone, developing this idea in his Music in Willa Cather's Fiction proposes that music is the art in Cather:

She employs music to express her belief in the vital feeling which is born through art and to preserve the mystery of creativity. Music appears in the newspaper pieces as metaphor of, or ideal analogy to, the excellence Willa Cather felt in all great art [It is] her assumption that music is the preeminent art, the condition toward which other significant forms aspire.⁷⁹

Folk-Art and the "Lesson of the Master":

One of the major problems in any discussion of art is a need for clarification of the term "art" itself. We have observed that for Cather, the term artist includes not only the painter, the novelist and the singer, but also the ballerina, the cook, even the tennis-player, the German housewife, and the farmer, the Pueblo pot-maker, the Spanish guitarist, the Mexican craftsman. At times, Cather separates these; at times she deals with them as part of the same universal impulse, the desire to create order and beauty through form and colour. Yet her treatment of art falls basically into three categories: the "folk-art" of the primitive Indians and of modern peasant societies, the sophisticated art of the great masters, and the cultured art of domesticity and the salon.

The first of these, the art of the people, is an outgrowth of the Romantic interest in the common people and particularly of that Rousseauist "cultural primitivism" which affirmed that human nature existed in its purest form in culturally simple and particularly rural environments where words, thoughts and feelings were expressed spontaneously and in true simplicity.⁸⁰ Long before this, Abrams explains, Giambattista Vico had developed a theory in his Scienze Nuova which combined the Lucretian belief that poetry pre-dated prose and that language arose to express feeling, with studies of song among the American Indians:

[He stated] the hypothesis that men in the first age after the flood thought, spoke, and acted imaginatively and instinctually, and therefore poetically; and that these early poetic expressions and activities contained the seeds of all the later arts, sciences and social institutions. . . . [They were] dominated by sense and

imagination, not by reason, and their first mode of thought was passionate, animistic, particularistic, and mythical, rather than rational and abstract; therefore they 'were by nature sublime poets'.⁸¹

Rousseau's belief that "the first languages were song-like, passionate, figurative, and therefore the language of poets, not of geometers"⁸² can be supplemented by Hamann's proposal that, since the language in the garden of Eden was divinely inspired, it must have been musical and poetic.⁸³ By the second part of the eighteenth century, Abrams notes that the definition of "primitive" or natural art included many diverse types, among them Homer's epics, the Hebrew sacred writings and contemporary poems of the American Indians and the South Sea Islanders:

These minstrels in turn were held to be poetically akin to the folk balladers of Scotland and England, as well as to the "natural" and "artless" poetical threshers, shoemakers, and washerwomen of modern vintage, who had been happily protected by social barriers from the refinements of civilization and advanced literary art. Finally, all these songsters were asserted by some critics to possess qualities in common with those "natural geniuses" in a more highly developed cultural milieu who, whether through ignorance of models or strength of innate poetic faculty, composed from nature rather than from art. . . . [They composed] spontaneously, artlessly and without forethought either of their design or their audience. . . under the stress of personal feeling; and their compositions were often characterized by various metaphors of the internal-made-external.⁸⁴

Abrams notes too that these critics were themselves primitivists, and claimed these qualities to be enduring criteria for all poetry.⁸⁵

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginnings of the twentieth, a new interest in primitivism emerged in painting, music and in literature, perhaps as a reaction to the growing realism and naturalism of the period, in the works of such artists as Matisse,

Henri Rousseau and Gauguin. Cather's preoccupation with folk and peasant art, then, is only another facet of this new movement.

Aldous Huxley accounts for this new primitivism as a form of nostalgia for the simpler social organizations of the past in his essay "On Handicrafts", and suggests that modern admiration for Indian art is "an intemperate and hysterical enthusiasm" resulting from the desire to escape from Middletown and Zenith, and an admiration for a stable community life, the personal satisfaction of craftsmanship, and the simplicity and chastity of a form limited by primitive materials and tools.⁸⁶ He concludes dogmatically that "peasant art is hardly ever intrinsically significant as art; its value is social and psychological, rather than aesthetic" and that the nature of even the best handicraft is "essentially inferior to that of the excellence we find in the work of a great artist".⁸⁷

Although Huxley is perhaps extreme in his statements, they do have some validity as a corrective to the modern bias for primitive art, and to the perspective of Cather as a whole. For Cather does not really differentiate in quality between folk art and sophisticated art, frequently using the former to illustrate qualities of the latter. The Pueblo pottery is interesting from a historical point of view, she conceded, because it reveals some desire in humanity for form and colour "to gratify something that had no concern with food and shelter", and she establishes this desire as the initiator of the "major arts (poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, music)".⁸⁸ These arts all share certain common characteristics, in particular their associations with human struggle and human desire which enhance their value as arti-

facts. In the Pueblo pottery, Cather finds a record of a race and an era long-past but still preserved:

You were able to conjure up the women who, under conditions of incredible difficulty, had still designed and moulded them, 'dreamed' the fine geometry of the designs, and made beautiful objects for daily use out of the river-bottom clay.⁸⁹

The society who defeated these dreamers is paralleled to their modern descendants who are more concerned with material goods than with relics of a decayed civilization and who use as ashtrays the pottery which Tom holds as his inheritance from his ancestors. In her letter "On Death Comes for the Archbishop," Cather refers again to the essential humanity rather than the aesthetic quality of folk-art, in her description of the mission churches of New Mexico:

The old mission churches, even those which were abandoned and in ruins, had a moving reality about them; the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling. They were all fresh, individual, first-hand. . . . The people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way [of telling what they felt] and left their message.⁹⁰

Although the factory-made crosses and images, imported from Ohio to replace them, are equally effective spiritually, they are not "art", which for Cather is a record of life made by human hands and expressing human passions and struggles with life. Here she makes no differentiation between bad and good carving; all express equally human joys and sorrows. In modern life, this is still true; beauty is acquired for Cather not through aesthetic design but through human association, as she indicates in her statement to the Lincoln Sunday Star in 1921:

New things are always ugly. New clothes are always ugly. A prima donna will never wear a new gown upon the stage. . . . A house can never be beautiful until it has been lived in for a long time.

An old house built in miserable taste is more beautiful than a new house built and furnished in correct taste. The beauty lies in the associations that cluster around it, the way in which the house has fitted itself to the people.⁹¹

But the real appeal which Cather finds in folk-art is perhaps suggested by the emphasis she places on handicraft in a comment on modern education:

I think it is a great misfortune for everyone to have the chance to write--to have the chance to read, for that matter. A little culture makes lazy handiwork, and handiwork is a beautiful education in itself, and something real. Good carpentry, good weaving, all the handicrafts were much sounder forms of education than what the people are getting now. . . . The one education which amounts to anything is learning how to do something well whether it is make a bookcase or write a book. If I could get a carpenter to make me some good bookcases, I would have as much respect for him as I have for the people whose books I want to put on them. Making something well is the principal end of education.⁹²

In "Nebraska :The End of the First Cycle", she laments "The generation in the driver's seat hates to make anything. . . . They want to buy everything ready-made: clothes, food, education, music, pleasure"⁹³ and in an interview in New York in 1922, she opposes art and creativity to the machine:

Restlessness such as ours, success such as ours, do not make for beauty. Other things must come first: good cookery, cottages that are homes, not playthings; gardens, repose. These are first rate things, and out of first rate stuff art is made. It is possible that machinery has finished us as far as this is concerned. Nobody stays at home any more; nobody makes anything beautiful any more.⁹⁴

Perhaps the most important quality of art and handicraft for Cather is their ability to convey a joy and happiness unknown to those who have no feeling for art, a belief similar to that of Sandburg's poem "Fellow Citizens" comparing the accordion maker who plays his own instrument to the mayor and the millionaire: "he is the only Chicago

citizen I was jealous of that day./He played a dance they play in some parts of Italy when the harvest of grapes is over and the wine presses are ready for work".⁹⁵ The Song of the Lark and Death Comes for the Archbishop emphasize most clearly the role of the folk-artist in Cather's fiction. The Mexicans Thea finds "a really musical people. . . . They turned themselves and all they had over to her'. For the moment they cared about nothing in the world but what she was doing"⁹⁶ and she is able to sing for them in a way that she cannot for any other peoples. Spanish Johnny has a voice "thin, unsteady, husky in the middle tones" yet he sings sweetly and with real happiness.⁹⁷ He also plays the mandolin with "exceptional skill", and displays the visionary quality of the artist and the yearning for the inaccessible in combination with the naivety of the primitive, in his search to find the sea which calls to him through the conch-shell: "To him, it is the sea itself. A little thing is big to him".⁹⁸ Much of the art of Death Comes for the Archbishop is concerned with the handicraft of the Mexicans, their crude hand-made crosses, their images, their skill in silver-working, passed down from the Moors through the Spaniards, their embroidery and lace-work and the decoration which they bestow on the little doll-like Virgins. The Indian descendents of the Pueblos too reveal their inheritance of the love of beauty through their embroidered buckskin, their necklaces of wampum and turquoise, and their love of costume.⁹⁹

The peasant immigrants of Europe also function as folk-artists in the earlier novels, in particular the simple French and Bohemians of O Pioneers! who correspond to the Mexicans in The Song

of the Lark in their enjoyment of dancing, singing and festivals, and their participation on the ceremonies of the church which merge sacred and secular, death and life. The associations of vitality and colour with the Catholic countries of Europe is evident as early as Cather's travel accounts in 1903 where she finds the Italian quarter of London with its little shrines and burning candles, its cut flowers in every window, a brave attempt to carry "a little of the light and colour and sweet devoutness of a Latin land into their grey, cold London".¹⁰⁰

And both Marie and Ántonia, with their warmth and sunniness, their vitality and youth, are actualizations of this quality of life which Cather finds in peasant art but which is missing in modern cultivated American society. These folk-arts add a background of colour and warmth to the three early novels, but they disappear almost entirely in One of Ours and A Lost Lady, to reemerge in The Professor's House as the qualities of a past society in opposition to the materialism of America after the First World War, and no longer available to it. Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock then return to these arts in an attempt to recover the lost past and to evade the conclusions of modern sterility and aesthetic emptiness.

The treatment of the accomplished artist in Cather's fiction is even more elusive, for while it is basic to the understanding of One of Ours, A Lost Lady and The Professor's House which examine the sterility of society in terms of its negation of art, it is handled fully in one major novel only, and is expanded in a number of short stories which deal primarily with the artist against society rather than with the qualities of his art. Moreover, Cather faces the

problem common to any novelist who approaches the artist: how to convince the reader that the art is genuine and great, to demonstrate rather than to state its effect through third-party comments. In one of his plays, Shaw places the backs of the canvases to the audience and we are able to judge their value as art only through the reactions of the characters on stage. Nevertheless, the test of the author's success lies in his ability to convince, and Cather does not succeed in convincing us of Thea's voice in the last section of The Song of the Lark where she introduces Doctor Archie as third-person narrator (in order to cover the distancing of the prima diva after ten years's absence) and resorts to ecstatic statements by all of Thea's male admirers as proof of her talent, all of whom we are required to accept as reliable authorities.¹⁰¹ Cather is more successful in her short stories and in Alexander's Bridge, where she makes no attempt to recreate the art but simply states that it exists.

Despite this flaw, The Song of the Lark is Cather's major statement on the life and development of the artist. Here Cather elaborates her theory of art and the needs of the artist, whether he attains success or failure.¹⁰² The first of these needs is desire; as Grant Reynard remarks of Cather:

She was convinced that the great thing was desire in art, that a desire to express ourselves be a clear compelling thing that must out, whether it be a poem, a painting, a novel, a symphony, or a piece of sculpture.¹⁰³

This idea becomes a key theme in The Song of the Lark where it is stressed by Thea's first music teacher, A. Wunsch: "Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. The world is little, people are

little, human life is little. There is only one big thing--desire.¹⁰⁴

He explains to Thea that art is a combination of talent and training, that much knowledge is required but that there must first be an initial impulse towards creativity:

Some things cannot be taught. If you do not know in the beginning, you do not know in the end. For a singer there must be something in the inside from the beginning What makes the rose to red, the sky to blue, the man to love--in der Brust, in der Brust it is, und ohne dieses giebt es keine Kunst!¹⁰⁵

This "something" is soul, Cather explains elsewhere, and it is the soul which creates the desire for self-expression and hence the art:

"After all the supreme virtue in art is soul, perhaps it is the only thing which gives art the right to be".¹⁰⁶ This statement is clarified by an anecdote narrated by Ethelbert Neven at a meeting with Cather and Mark Hambourg. He was requested by Madame Marchesi to hear her most gifted pupil, who had "one of the most wonderful voices in the world, but little art and no message, nothing to tell with all those splendid tones". And then her daughter Blanche was asked to sing:

That unattractive little woman with next to no voice at all, but with her splendid art, her lyric soul, began to sing and I felt as a traveller in arid deserts when he comes again to springs of living water and the green hills of home. Then I knew that it is art, not gift, which is divine, and that the only beauty which ever has been or ever can be is the beauty of the soul.¹⁰⁷

Yet talent, desire and "soul" are not enough; training and development are essential if the artist is to achieve his potential. This phase is rarely recorded in Cather's fiction; even in The Song of the Lark, although we observe Thea's growing frustration with the exercises and routine which seem to be robbing her voice of its freedom and beauty, we really glimpse very little of this stage, and

we must look to Cather's comments on her own development and that of other artists in her critical essays to realize its importance. Yet its effects are evident; great art is a product of innate talent, training, sophistication and rigorous selection, but the accomplished work must appear not complex but simple. As Cather remarks in "The Novel D  meubl  "; "the higher processes of art are all processes of simplification" and again in "The Art of Fiction":

Art, it seems to me should simplify. That, indeed, is very nearly the whole of the higher artistic process; finding what conventions of form and detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole. . . . Millet had done hundreds of sketches of peasants sowing grain, some of them very complicated and interesting, but when he came to paint the spirit of them all into one picture, "The Sower", the composition is so simple it seems inevitable. . . . Any first-rate novel or story must have in it the strength of a dozen fairly good stories that have been sacrificed to it.¹⁰⁸

Thea too simplifies, as Ottenburg explains to Doctor Archie:

It's the idea, the basic idea, pulsing behind every bar she sings. She simplifies a character down to the musical idea it's build on, and makes everything conform to that. . . . Instead of inventing a lot of business and expedients to suggest character, she knows the thing at the root, and lets the musical pattern take care of her.¹⁰⁹

And she achieves, in Sieglinde, her full development, the peak of her talent and her training: "Artistic growth is, more than it is anything else, a refining of the sense of truthfulness. The stupid believe that to be truthful is easy; only the artist, the great artist, knows how difficult it is".¹¹⁰ In the supreme artist, the elements of art merge into a unity which cannot be analysed but only felt, as Cather observes in her essay on Katharine Mansfield:

The qualities of a second-rate writer can easily be defined, but a first-rate writer can only be experienced. It is just the thing in him which escapes analysis that makes him first-rate. One can catalogue all the qualities that he shares with other writers,

but the thing that is his very own, his timbre, this cannot be defined or explained.¹¹¹

Ultimately then, the folk-art and the art of the master are similar. Both emerge from a sensitivity to form and colour, and a desire to record in permanent form the passing impressions of life. While folk-art is simple, primitive in its appeal and structure, the art of the master moves from simplicity through increasing complexity and sophistication to return again to simplicity. Both bring the joy of creation, of the maker who imitates God in imposing form on the world, and both feel a similar response to the powers of art, nature and humanity as Cather explains in her story of an American sculptor, "The Namesake":

It was the same feeling that artists know when we rarely achieve truth in our work: the feeling of union with some great force, of purpose and security, of feeling glad that we have lived. For the first time I felt the pull of race and kindred, and felt, beating within me, things that had not begun with me. It was as if the earth under my feet had grasped and rooted me and were pouring its essence into me.¹¹²

The "Comely Life": Art and the Salon.¹¹³

The importance of the salon as a form of art becomes increasingly evident in Cather's fiction after A Lost Lady and is a predominant theme in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, where it is second only to, and sometimes surpasses, religious art. Elizabeth Sergeant points out that for Cather a good meal has always been "one of life's serious pleasures. Conversation must never divert one from the quality of food on the plate and the wine in the glass".¹¹⁴ This interest she shares with others of her time, in particular the Bloomsburyites, but the emphasis which she placed upon this aspect of

culture in the end leads her to what Trilling calls a concern with pots and pans on the level of the Women's Home Companion.¹¹⁵

The essay "148 Charles Street" states most clearly Cather's concept of the salon as it is depicted in the drawing-room of Mrs. James T. Fields, wife of the great nineteenth-century publisher. Here over a period of sixty years, Mrs. Fields entertained all the great figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Dickens, Thackeray, Hawthorne; Arnold, Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson; Lowell, Sumner and Norton and Oliver Wendell Holmes; Salvani, Modjeska, Edwin Booth, Christopher Nilsson, Winslow Homer and Sargent; Joseph Jefferson and Warren and Ole Bull. Over the tea-table, Mrs. Fields presides in black velvet, with pink cheeks, merry eyes and mobile mouth, blending all the personalities of her artistic and sensitive guests into a harmony. She is Cather's contact with the past and its rich culture for she reads aloud Shakespeare and Milton, Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" and Tristan and Iseult, comments on Dryden's prefaces and quotes Donne's "Bracelet of bright hair".¹¹⁶ She recounts Pauline Viardot's singing of Gluck's Orpheus, and Dicken's account of his pleasure in Viardot's favour during a reading of his works in Paris. She has entertained Turgeniev in her summer home, and talked to Leigh Hunt of Shelley's beauty; she possesses a lock of Keats' hair and Severn's drawing of him. She tells of Chorley's conversations, of the Browning's little boy, of Henry James Senior and his belief in his son's first essays and stories, and of her reading of James' fiction as it appeared, on summer days by the sea.

Although a living contact with the past, Mrs. Fields herself

lives very much in the present: "At eighty she could still entertain new people, new ideas, new forms of art".¹¹⁷ She can talk of Manet and the Impressionists, and she tells Cather she was destined not to "escape anything, not even the free verse of the Cubists".¹¹⁸ Yet the salon itself becomes for Cather a symbol of a past era, captured in "an atmosphere in which one seemed absolutely safe from everything ugly".¹¹⁹:

The past lay in wait for one in all the corners; it exuded from the furniture, from the pictures, the rare editions, and the cabinets of manuscripts. . . . It was a place where the past lived on--where it was protected and cherished, had sanctuary from the noisy push of the present.¹²⁰

And again:

The ugliness of the world, all possibilities of wrenches and jars and wounding contacts, seemed securely shut out. It was indeed the peace of the past, where the tawdry and cheap have been eliminated, and the enduring things have taken their proper, happy places.¹²¹

Today the old house has been torn down and replaced with a garage. For Cather, this symbolizes the replacement of the artistic order with the mechanistic, the old and time-honoured with the new. Even Lawrence is out-dated in English classes, although Faulkner survives yet.

And Cather concludes bitterly:

Only in memory exists the long, green-carpeted, softly-lighted drawing-room, and the dining-table where Learning and Talent met, enjoying good food and good wine and rare vintages, looking confidently to the growth of their country in the finer amenities of life. Perhaps the garage and all it stands for represent the only real development, and have altogether taken the place of things formerly cherished on that spot.¹²²

For Mrs. Fields, says Cather "there was no revaluation. She died with her world (the world of 'letters' which mattered most to her) unchallenged. . . in that house of memories, with the material

keepsakes of the past about her".¹²³ While we cannot but feel that Mrs. Fields with her tenacity and her adaptability would have found something in this modern cultural desert, Cather's interpretation is significant since it underlies her whole concept of civilization and the modern problem. Her faith in the "comely life" of gourmet cooking, rare wines, intellectual conversation over music and books, art and artists; her conviction that this mode of life is dead, that it ceased when the world broke in two in 1922; and the attendant conviction that it can be found again only through the re-envocation of this lost past in fiction: these three central ideas mark the three consecutive stages of Cather's development in the novel from Alexander's Bridge to My Ántonia, from One of Ours to My Mortal Enemy and from Death Comes for the Archbishop to Shadows on the Rock.

In Cather's first phase, where the order of nature is central, these domestic and cultural associations are muted, and take their place as part of Cather's recreation of rural life and its daily routines of cooking and eating, baking and singing. From the first Cather has looked to the immigrant farm women around Red Cloud for the preservation of the culture which they have brought from the Old World and transplanted to the New:

I have never found any intellectual excitement more intense than I used to feel when I spent a morning with one of those pioneer women at her baking or butter-making. . . . I always felt as if they told me so much more than they said--as if I had got inside another person's skin.¹²⁴

These pioneer women are artists, and their art is identical with enjoyment of life; "artistic appreciation should include all the activities of life, from the enjoyment of the morning bath to cooking

a roast just right, 'so that it is brown and dripping ~~and~~ odorous and saignant'.¹²⁵ The farmer's wife who enjoys her large family, her cooking and sewing and canning, is a prima donna like the best cooks: "the way to their hearts was the same I must eat a great deal, and enjoy it".¹²⁶

Cather's first formulation of this pioneer figure is Mrs.

Bergson of O Pioneers!:

Alexandra often said that if her mother were cast upon a desert island, she would thank God for her deliverance, make a garden, and find something to preserve She could still take some comfort in the world if she had bacon in the cave, glass jars on the shelves, and sheets in the press.¹²⁷

In My Ántonia, domestic order is established by Ántonia who blends the Virginia traditions of Grandmother Burden, the best of her native Bohemian customs, and the culture of the Norwegian Harlings to produce a truly American culture, harmonizing old and new. She immerses herself, first in the ordered living of the Burden household which contrasts strongly with the clutter and disorder of the Shimerda world, and later in the warm comfort of the Harling family, where Mrs. Harling represents the domestic artist:

There was a basic harmony between Ántonia and her mistress They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters asleep in them They shared a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate but invigorating.¹²⁸

And in the final section, Ántonia is the embodiment of domestic order and culture; her chests are full of clean blankets, her kolaches famous, her orchards bearing cherries, apples and currants, her fruit-cellars stocked with jars of crabapples and strawberries and

barrels of pickle and water-melon rind. In "Neighbour Rosicky", the same family is pictured in somewhat similar circumstances. Doctor Ed describes the Rosicky kitchen as a warm cheery place with cheerful geraniums blooming in the windows, the table covered with oil cloth, the kitchen warm with the smell of hot coffee, sausage and hot biscuit, and the children healthy with colour and vigour. Even the central contrast of the tale, between city and country, Europe and America, is achieved through the connotations of food, the starving boy in London watching the windows full of Christmas cakes and fowls and oranges, and the Fourth of July feast on fried chicken, and plums, hot biscuit and grape wine, despite economic disaster. The success of domestic culture is indicated in Rosicky's rejection of the city with its music and dances and opera, for the homely life of the farm: "I ain't never been hungry since I had your mudder to cook for me".¹²⁹

Although chronologically they fit in this first phase, both Alexander's Bridge and The Song of the Lark represent the denial of the salon for art. Alexander is caught between Winnifred and the Boston home overlooking the river like 148 Charles Street, full of warmth and cheer and the music and personality of Winnifred; and Hilda and London which represent the vigour, passion, and the attendant upheaval of art. Although Alexander loses his life as an implied result of the conflict, Thea Kronberg survives and continues undiminished by this struggle. Her appreciation of the "comely life" is intermittent and always subject to the demands of art. While she enjoys fully a dinner with Doctor Archie and Ottenburg, when she is

called to the theatre to sing, she remarks bitterly "If only you hadn't made me eat--Damn that duck!"¹³⁰ Cigars disturb her throat, air brings colds, excitement destroys her sleep patterns; she becomes a slave to her talent. The life of Mrs. Fields and of Winnifred Alexander is then not possible for the true artist, but only for the sympatico¹³¹--the Kohlers in Moonstone, the Nathanmeyers and Fred Ottenburg in Chicago, Doctor Archie in Denver--and these latter represent the world of leisure and enjoyment, music and reading, gourmet dinners and cultured conversations which the artist through her active participation is able to enjoy only occasionally.

In One of Ours and A Lost Lady, Cather enters her second phase, recording for us the death of the comely life in America. For Claude, the Erlichs represent a kind of life which he has not been able to discover at home. Unlike the Wheelers they "knew how to live"¹³²; they valued money not as an end in itself but as a source of comfort and stimulation. Claude resents that he cannot take a friend to dinner at a hotel, wear a clean shirt and new collar every day, and travel on the Pullman coach by day. He sends red roses to Mrs. Erlich in deliberate defiance of Wheeler mores, for he values a way of life which is not remarkable but full of humanity, warmth, enthusiasm and understanding. But Claude's fate cuts him off from culture and art, the richer life which he desires, and sends him back to the farm. The state of the Wheeler household symbolizes the state of America. Claude represents what-might-have-been, while Ralph and Bayliss represent the two directions of modern life, the machine and business enterprise. Even Gladys Farmer, the local music-teacher, is

controlled and dominated by Bayliss who courts her, and by the townspeople who pay her salary. In the end, Claude seeks in France what he cannot find in modern America, what Cather calls the "tranquillity of an old, ordered, comprehensible civilization".¹³³ And with Claude's death, America's potentiality to achieve this way of life ceases. Art in America is dead, killed not by the war but by modern industrialism and commercialism.

In A Lost Lady, there is no longer the possibility of escape to a richer world, and Mrs. Forrester is a reduced and diminished Mrs. Fields, controlled now by her environment rather than controlling it. An "objet d'art" in herself as Elizabeth Sergeant suggests¹³⁴, she is defined by the society around her. The graces and charms of her youth, the freshness of manner and warmth of personality, become tarnished in contact with the later generation of Ivy Peters and his associates. She becomes a symbol no longer of the "comely life" but of the fallen state of culture in the modern world; that culture depends upon a class society is explicit in the novel: "It was one thing to greet the President of the Colorado and Utah en déshabillé, but it was another to chatter with a coarse-grained fellow like Ivy Peters in her wrapper and slippers".¹³⁵ The two dinner parties contrast these two worlds effectively, and in the second, Cather laments that even the art of carving is dead.¹³⁶ The boys do not recognize the quality of the dinner-service or of the dinner; they do not converse gracefully: "they wanted more duck and to be let alone with it".¹³⁷ For Neil the death of the Captain is the "sunset of the pioneer"¹³⁸ and of the culture which he has established, and he turns against Marian

not for moral reasons, but primarily, for aesthetic ones. In the end she marries a man rich, stingy and quarrelsome, and becomes the lost lady; like America she lives on only in memory, preserved through her recreation in the form of art.

The Professor's House belongs too to this period, yet it deals with the problem of loss more deeply and suggests the Professor's recognition that the comely life alone is not enough. Undoubtedly, the Professor is a connoisseur of foods and wines. He hoards the wine imported from Spain before Prohibition and condemns America for its legislation against "culture". He lunches in his attic study on "chicken sandwiches with lettuce leaves, red California grapes and two shapely, long-necked russet pears" with one of the best dinner napkins because "he hated ugly linen"¹³⁹; he serves Tom Outland one evening during a bachelor summer "a fine leg of lamb, saignant, well rubbed with garlic, a dish of steaming asparagus, swathed in a napkin to keep it hot, and a bottle of sparkling Asti".¹⁴⁰ He hates ugliness in any form, and despises Crane, a stern Baptist who objects to claret, is shocked by music and dancing, has married a homely girl and lives with his "three very plain daughters" "in the most depressing and unnecessary ugliness".¹⁴¹ The Professor rejoices that his wife has never made "shabby compromises", has kept up her appearance in spite of difficulties¹⁴² and he fully admits:

He was by no means an ascetic. He knew that he was terribly selfish about personal pleasures, fought for them. If a thing gave him delight, he got it, if he sold his shirt for it. By doing without many so-called necessities he had managed to have his luxuries.¹⁴³

Yet the issue is not so simple. For the old house which the

Professor hates to leave is described as "almost as ugly as it is possible for a house to be"; its paint, the colour of ashes, its porch too narrow, its halls cramped and stairs steep¹⁴⁴. In contrast the new house is arranged and ordered by Lillian to perfection. Yet the Professor rejects the new house and its whole way of life, signified by its associations with the Marcelluses who are able to buy the comely life. And he recognizes that pleasure, even that of the salon, cannot be bought:

If with that cheque I could have brought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house. But one couldn't get that for twenty thousand dollars. The great pleasures don't come so cheap.¹⁴⁵

And so Cather returns to her theme of Alexander's Bridge; the life of the salon cannot conceal the emptiness of life without desire or art. And the image of the salon itself becomes tainted, for it merges with commercialization to "buy"; as Cather has said so long ago in the Journal: "America is a strange country. It doesn't make, but it buys".¹⁴⁶

The final phase of Cather's fiction is marked by a retreat to the American past, and here the comely life, no longer the product of "commercialism", is recreated through the transfer of culture from the Old World of Italy and France to the raw crude frontier. In this phase, the life of the artist and his search for order becomes important, and a new emphasis is placed upon ritual, both the ritual of the salon and the ritual of religious aestheticism. And here the ideal of the comely life, part of the realistic background of the nature novels and then an illustration of the decline of modern America from the

ideals of the past, now becomes dominant and a concern in itself.

And Trilling remarks that in the end, Cather's 'mystical concern with pots and pans. . . does not seem much more than an oblique defence of gentility or very far from the gaudy domesticity of bourgeois accumulation glorified in The Women's Home Companion'.¹⁴⁷

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, food takes a central place as a form of cultural transfer, and soup represents a cultural link with the French past and art: "There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup".¹⁴⁸ The novel emphasizes the lack on the raw frontier of such niceties as salad greens and to Latour, Vaillant's real sacrifice as a missionary priest in the mining towns of Colorado is not the danger or the loneliness, the difficulties physical and spiritual, but the lack of the "decencies of life": butter, milk, fruit, salads, linen sheets and table-cloths. Latour himself appears to live in luxury, despite the emphasis of Cather upon the crudeness of the frontier life to which he is exposed. He has created a garden to supply salad greens, vegetables and flowers, and manages to buy wine although Vaillant complains "It is not easy to separate these rich Mexicans from their French wine. They know its worth".¹⁴⁹ He has a large and valuable library which he once saved at the risk of his life, a hammered silver dressing set donated by the Olivares, silver candlesticks and a walnut secretary, hand-made linens and laces for his person and household, and all the amenities of life.¹⁵⁰ The whole of the "Dona Isabella" section is connected rather tenuously with the theme of building the Cathedral, in order to suggest the islands of cultural life even here, and Dona Isabella

is a gracious hostess like Mrs. Fields and Marian Forrester, talented in conversation and the arts: "It was refreshing to spend an evening with a couple who were interested in what was going on in the outside world, to eat a good dinner and drink good wine, and listen to music".¹⁵¹ Even the emphasis on religious ritual is overwhelmed by descriptions of feasting and celebrating; at one point four sacraments are performed in as many lines and the following two pages examine the decoration of the altar, the roasting of the mutton, and the atmosphere of domestic peace following the feast.¹⁵²

This concern for the gracious life reaches its height in Shadows on the Rock, where Cather observes rather absurdly: "His dinner Auclair regarded as the thing that kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman".¹⁵³ The salon dominates in the novel and Cécile is the tender of the "sacred fire":

Really, a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of French villages. Those people brought a kind of French culture there. . . tended it, and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire.¹⁵⁴

Madame Auclair has brought to America her household goods "without which she could not imagine life at all" to recreate in Quebec the salon in Paris with the same furniture and carpet, the same colour-prints, the same candelabra: "As long as she lived she tried to make the new life as much as possible like the old".¹⁵⁵ She tells Cécile "At home, in France, we have learned to do all these things in the best way, and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe" and she dies, hoping that through Cecile: "Life would go on almost unchanged in this room with its dear (and, to her, beautiful)

objects; that the proprieties would be observed, all the little shades of feeling which make the common fine".¹⁵⁶ Cécile's education concerns her developing recognition that her mother is right, and that the Harnois, and the people they represent, are wrong:

They had kind ways, those poor Harnois, but that was not enough; one had to have kind things about one, too. . . . [With these coppers and brooms] one made, not shoes or cabinet-work, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate, one made the days,--the complexion, the special flavour, the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life."¹⁵⁷

And so in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, Cather comes to the determination that life exists not in heroism and sacrifice, not in the dedication of the pioneer, the artist or the saint to ideals which are unattainable, but in the little things of everyday life which create pleasure and maintain tradition. While Cécile is, in a sense, a projection of *Ántonia*, there is no longer real struggle with poverty and depression, no evil to overcome. While *Ántonia* builds her home on the ruins of her life, Cécile's closest brush with reality is her connection with the dirty Harnois children who refer to animal functions Cécile ignores. And her marriage to Pierre Charron, the stereotyped roué, leads to eternal peace and happiness, and a future which is notable for its preservation of the past and changelessness. In the extremity of her commitment to the art of the salon, Cather comes to the point where the novel is so *démeublé* that we have thrown out not only all the furniture but the drama as well, and are left with the four walls! ¹⁵⁸

The Artist as Hero:

As we have already indicated, Cather's concept of the artist is influenced by the Romantic emphasis on art as an expression of life rather than an imitation of it. The personality of the artist moves to the foreground and he becomes no longer a copyist but a creator, even a Godlike creature who imposes form and order on his own experience to create beauty and meaning in life. In this sense Wordsworth's poetry becomes a quest for understanding of the self, and the Prelude examines the development of the poet's mind through the various stages of life in order to come to self-knowledge and thence knowledge of man in general.

Although Cather does break art into three categories, that of Folk and Peasant Art, Salon Art and the Art of the Master, her treatment of the artist is confined almost solely to the last category. The farmer's wife, the German housewife, and the cook may be artists in some sense, but although Cather remarks that they are of the "same type" as "most of the women artists I have known--the prima donnas, novelists, poets, sculptors",¹⁵⁹ there is really no similarity between Ántonia and Thea or between Cécile and Claude or Gladys Farmer, beyond the fact that they enjoy giving pleasure through their creativity. Only Marian Forrester would fit in the category of Romantic artist-hero, and even she is not a shaper but a reflector who gives in passively to her environment and sacrifices her art to her comfort and pleasure. The folk-artist is not a central figure at all; while he influences the artist through his work, as Spanish Johnny does Thea and as the Pueblo potters do Thea, Tom Outland and Cather herself, they are

always secondary rather than primary characters. The artist-hero, then, is the individual in modern America who consciously accepts the ideals of art and either succeeds or fails in embodying them in significant form for his audiences.

Several studies of Cather have concentrated on the role of the artist in her fiction. The doctoral thesis of Sister Colette Toler, "Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the works of Willa Cather", treats the major novels as reflections of Cather's own artistic career, presenting "the fight of the artist to maintain his integrity in a world dominated by philistines, the struggle of sensitivity against compromise and mediocrity, the toll taken by isolation, the study of the creative essence and its growth".¹⁶⁰ Toler divides society into six groups: the true dedicated artists Thea, Harsanyi, Clement Sebastian; secondary artists who have talent and success but no desire; secondary artists who lack either talent or commitment; secondary artists who compromise for easy success; dilettantes such as Fred Ottenburg and Paul of "Paul's Case"; and the natural artists Spanish Johnny and Blind d'Arnault.¹⁶¹ Schmittlein, in his doctoral thesis "Willa Cather's Novels as Evolving Art", differentiates more simply between the afficionado or art connoisseur, the sympatico who is attracted and sympathetic to art but who lacks the emotional, the intellectual or the creative ability of the artist, and the wider society of non-artists.¹⁶² In his terms, Claude, Fred Ottenburg and Paul of "Paul's Case" are sympatico for they reveal an appreciation and sympathy for art but have no field of expression.

In his Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, Maurice Beebe defines

the term "artist" rather more broadly in terms of the modern "artist-novel":

I am using the term "artist" to mean anyone capable of creating works of art, whether literary, musical or visual. In fact, actual production is not a requirement for the artist-hero, for some of the characters I discuss are only potential artists, and a few are not identified as artists at all, though they are obviously surrogates for their authors.¹⁶³

This identification of author and hero is frequently close; Beebe cites the example of Lawrence in Sons and Lovers in which the hero is a painter, but at one point of stress Lawrence observes: "The pen stopped writing".¹⁶⁴ We find a similar confusion between author and heroine in The Song of the Lark where ideas are attributed to the young Thea which obviously belong not to the developing singer but to the developing writer. The connection between Panther Canyon and art, natural in fiction, must be forced into an unnatural pattern to accomodate Thea's form of art. Moreover, Sergeant notes the major flaw of the novel in the separation of the young Thea alias Cather from the mature Thea or Fremstad, a separation of which neither Cather herself nor Olive Fremstad seemed to be aware.¹⁶⁵ But Beebe's broader definition explains certain features of the novels which are not explained by either Toler's or Schmittlein's categories: not only is Jim Burden of My Ántonia an author-surrogate who gives form to his impressions of life in his story, but also Claude Wheeler, a boy who has no apparent creative ability and no reason for his suggested endowment of higher sensibility. And while Professor St. Peter has an accomplished work of art in his seven volumes of Spanish-American history, the Archbishop whose cathedral is in many ways his

only through his choice of the stone and the architect, is also an artist in terms of his sensibility and his position in the novel as author-surrogate.

The structure of many of these works also conforms to Beebe's definition of the artist-novel:

Narrative development in the typical artist-novel requires that the hero test and reject the claims of love and life, of God, home and country, until nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as an artist. Quest for self is the dominant theme of the artist-novel, and because the self is almost always in conflict with society, a closely related theme is the opposition of art to life. The artist as hero is usually therefore the artist as exile.¹⁶⁶

Although My Ántonia belongs to the first period of the order of nature, in many ways it too is an artist novel for it concerns the search of Jim Burden for self which he finds eventually in nature and Ántonia; this search has led to the temporary rejection of home, country and religious ties for the new-found world of art and culture, and later the rejection of society and its mores to return to Ántonia. Jim's artistic mission becomes the transmission of Ántonia and the life she recalls, the simple pioneer days of the early West, and the simple Wordsworthian joys of childhood close to the sources of life. The Song of the Lark clearly explores a quest for self in art, and Thea sacrifices not only her home and family but even her personal life to her art. She refuses to come home from Dresden, Germany, when her dying mother asks, so that she will not lose her first chance to sing the role of Elizabeth in Tannhäuser, and she remarks to Fred Ottenburg, who shows some signs of impatience after waiting for her for ten years: "I've only a few friends, but I can lose every one of them, if

it has to be. I learned how to lose when my mother died".¹⁶⁷ While Cather herself determined differently, she made no real choice for she did not have to choose between her mother and her career. In practice too, she acceded to her belief; when she was requested to withdraw her short story "The Birthmark" from McClures' because it might cause unhappiness, she replied: "My art is more important than my friend".¹⁶⁸

Both Claude Wheeler of One of Ours and Neil Herbert of A Lost Lady are engaged in a quest to discover meaning in life. Both are submerged artists, for they share the artistic personality, and both are sterile. The underlying implication is that society is to blame for their failure. The West has seen not only the sunset of the pioneer but the sunset of the artist, and while Claude finds a temporary goal in France and sacrifices his life for it, there is no future for art in America. Finally in The Professor's House, St. Peter's quest for self leads ultimately to the rejection not only of his family, of society and the university, but of art and life itself. Tom dies young, before his illusions have been destroyed, but the Professor lives on to face an existence which seems to be meaningless. He can only reject society, and his family which comes to symbolize this society, through death; in the end, he compromises and lives on, without art and "without joy".

In the last two novels Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock Cather abandons a formal novel structure, and employs narrative to provide what Forster calls the backbone or tapeworm on which to hang the events.¹⁶⁹ Yet the Archbishop too has

a quest, although his quest is not self-discovery but the creation of culture in the New World, and for this he rejects home and family, love and culture, not for God so much as for the ideal of the Cathedral to which he sacrifices even his priestly concern for charity.¹⁷⁰ Yet he is no longer in conflict with society, for he defines the society about him and moulds it to his will. And the lesser Cécile Auclair is similarly an agent of transfer for culture from Old World to New, no longer even active but passive, no longer with any real self-recognition but in conventional modes. Such is the force of the past which no longer shapes the world of the author but which may be shaped to his desires.

The central characteristics of the Catherian artist are also clearly Romantic. Beebe sums up these typical qualities: he is always sensitive, usually introverted and self-centred, often passive, and sometimes so capable of abstracting himself from the world around him that he appears absent-minded or "possessed".¹⁷¹ He is a "man of passion" and his gift, as Wordsworth has indicated, is to live more fully than those around him, through greater enthusiasm and tenderness.¹⁷² Yet he avoids either romantic entanglement or marriage which conflicts with creativity,¹⁷³ and he is misunderstood by society for his standards and goals are not theirs.¹⁷⁴ In her earliest writings Cather indicates that she accepts these premises. In 1894 she observes:

An author's only safe course is to cling close to the skirts of his art, forsaking all others and keeping unto her as long as they two shall live. An artist should not be vexed by human hobbies or human follies; he should be able to lift himself up into the clear firmament of creation where the world is not. He should be among men but not one of them, in the world but not of the world. Other men may think and reason and believe and argue,

but he must create.¹⁷⁵

In 1896, she states that art requires the dedication of a religion and the service of a God:

In the kingdom of art there is no God but one God, and his service is so exacting that there are few men born of woman who are strong enough to take the vows. There is no paradise offered for a reward to the faithful, no celestial bowers, no houris, no scented wines; only death and the truth. "Thy truth then be thy dower."¹⁷⁶

The artist suffers not only from his struggle to express his idea of truth through the medium of language or paint, but also through his rejection by society which does not want his art; as Bloom observes, he is "essentially a tragic figure".¹⁷⁷ For he is exceptional, Cather observes, "not only from a superior endowment, but from a deeper purpose, and a willingness to pay the price instead of being paid for it".¹⁷⁸

As Jung commented:

The artist's life cannot be otherwise than full of conflicts, for two forces are at war within him--on the one hand the common human longing for happiness, satisfaction and security in life, and on the other a ruthless passion for creation which may go so far as to override every personal desire. . . . There are hardly any exceptions to the rule that a person must pay dearly for the divine gift of the creative fire.¹⁷⁹

Cather's study of Thea Kronberg is the fullest study of the life and personality of the realized artist, although Youth and the Bright Medusa does centre on artistic figures, usually through the viewpoint of their conflict with bourgeois society. It is Thea who illustrates most fully Cather's statement:

If he [the artist] achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his great gift; is the fine thing in him that alone can make his work fine.¹⁸⁰

For only through her art can Thea reach out to people and only under

the excitement of a performance does her beauty emerge: "Clearly, she knew only one way of being really kind, from the core of her heart out; and there was but one way in which she could give herself to people largely and gladly, spontaneously".¹⁸¹ At other times she is cold and remote even from her friends, isolated from people and events around, waiting for something indefinable. She is indifferent to the life-long devotion of Ottenburg, to the whims of Landry whom she enjoys wounding. She admits that her life is not ideal, but full of jealousies and petty hatreds and frustrations: "If you love the good thing vitally, enough to give up for it all that one must give up, then you must hate the cheap thing just as hard".¹⁸² And her life apart from the theatre is petty too; she worries about talking too loud, about catching a cold, about cigar smoke and about exhausting herself in an argument. She is not only the "harassed, susceptible human creature [who] comes and goes, subject to colds, brokers, dress-makers, managers",¹⁸³ but a woman who ruthlessly controls lives and determines destinies. She sacrifices not only her self to her art, but all those around her.

Yet this very self-centredness or egoism is one of the qualities of the artist, and Bloom points out that in "Three American Singers" Cather implies that egoism, social amorality, lack of caution, overwhelming but impersonal generosity, are not only limitations frequent in artists, but absolutely essential to their development.¹⁸⁴ Certainly Cather agrees with Mrs. Field's quotation from Aristotle: "With a great gift. . . we must be willing to bear greatly, because it has already greatly borne"¹⁸⁵, and for great art she would forgive "vanity,

sensitiveness, selfishness, indecision, and vacillation of will".¹⁸⁶

The artist must labour relentlessly to realize the gift which is within him, and in the end, his achievement is less than his ideals. The "spontaneous activity of mind", which for Meredith constitutes genius, is in actuality the outcome of many years of training and suffering: "Genius means relentless labour and passionate excitement from the hour one is born until the hour one dies".¹⁸⁷ And in this Cather asserts no one and no thing can assist him except "the early American virtues, courage, sturdiness, tough endeavour" which are demanded of the artist as of the pioneer. In order to create, he must learn to overcome. If he is helped by society, his art will not be born: "Nobody, young people especially, should be helped, no artist or writer either. Endowments, frescoes for public buildings, travelling fellowships be damned".¹⁸⁸ He must live in isolation; in the words of Fremstadt: "We are born alone, we make our way alone, we die alone".¹⁸⁹ And he achieves in the end only a small part of his heroic conception:

The artist spends a lifetime in pursuing the things that haunt him, in having his mind "teased" by them, in trying to get these conceptions down on paper exactly as they are to him, and not in conventional poses. . . . And at the end of a lifetime he emerges with much that is more or less happy experimenting, and comparatively little that is the very flower of himself and his genius.¹⁹⁰

Art as Escape:

In her essay on "Escapism" Willa Cather remarks: "What has art ever been but escape? . . . The world has a habit of being in a bad way from time to time, and art has never contributed anything to help matters--except escape".¹⁹¹ Sergeant quotes Robert Frost's comment

on the ambiguity of the term "escape"--"Is one escaping from something or to something?"--and observes that Cather escapes both from and to.¹⁹² In the context of her essay, Cather defines all great artists as escapists, for they exist outside the social and industrial routine of the workaday world. Schubert could not keep himself in shirts, and Tolstoi, Goethe, Viollet-le-Duc, Descartes and Sir Isaac Newton together would be unable to improve the living conditions of New York: "Nearly all the Escapists in the long past have managed their own budget and their social relations so unsuccessfully that I wouldn't want them for my landlords, or my bankers, or my neighbours".¹⁹³ Here, Cather rejects the didactic theory of art accepted by the "muck-rakers" and considers that social conditions are not suitable material for fiction; the true artist need not "go hunting among the ashcans of Sullivan street for his material".¹⁹⁴ And she concludes with Mary Colum's remark in the Yale Review: "The people who talk about the art of escape simply know nothing about art at all".¹⁹⁵

Here Cather is almost wilfully misinterpreting the issue in a restatement of Pater's affirmation "All art is quite useless".¹⁹⁶ Yet Cather indicates that the themes of the Hebrew and Greek writers are the universal characteristics of human beings:

the greed and selfishness innate in every individual; the valour which leads to power, and the tyranny which power begets. . . the seeming original injustice that creatures so splendidly aspiring should be inexorably doomed to fail; the unfairness of the contest in which beings whose realest life is in thought or endeavour are kept always under the shackles of their physical body. . . the hatreds and jealousies and treacheries [of patriarchal families and human life].¹⁹⁷

Certainly an art which deals with such universal human emotions and

problems is hardly an art of escape from the issues of life, whether it makes reference to the modern industrial, social and urban society or not. A historical novel is not necessarily a novel of escape any more than Dreiser's Sister Carrie. But if it turns to the past and a remote region, not in order to examine common human dilemmas and conditions, but to evade these in the modern world, to recreate an older world which can be manipulated, to exclude conflict and frustration and to resolve easily questions which are ultimately insoluble, then it becomes a form of escapism. And in Cather's own life, her fiction came ultimately to play this role.¹⁹⁸

In "A Bookman's Day" Roscoe quotes Willa Cather's remark that the stage and opera provide interest through "an escape into an amazing world where drabness and time-serving are forgotten in the illusion of adventure".¹⁹⁹ While Jim Burden and Lena find adventure and illusion in the theatres of Lincoln, they are admittedly naive, innocent of art as "a couple of jack-rabbits, run in off the prairie".²⁰⁰ And in "Paul's Case", Cather indicates very early that the illusions of the theatre are illusions only for the naive. At the theatre, Paul is able to forget the drab and sordid life of his home, the cracked mirror and zinc bathtub, the yellow wallpaper and the pictures of George Washington and John Calvin over his bed, the men and women rocking on the porches of the monotonous rows of identical houses:

It was at the theatre and at Carnegie Hall that Paul really lived; the rest was but a sleep and a forgetting. This was Paul's fairy-tale, and it had for him all the allurements of a secret love. The moment he inhaled the gassy, painty, dusty odour behind the scenes, he breathed like a prisoner set free, and felt within him the possibility of doing or saying, splendid, brilliant things. The moment the cracked orchestra beat out the overture from Martha,

or jerked at the serenade from Rigoletto, all stupid and ugly things slid from him, and his senses were deliciously, yet delicately fired.²⁰¹

The story is effective for it presents a dual point of view: that of the central figure Paul and of the omniscient narrator who rights the perspective through such words as "cracked" and "jerked" and such descriptions as "The soloist chanced to be a German woman, by no means in her first youth, and the mother of many children, but she wore a satin gown and a tiara".²⁰² And the boy who is "blinded" by her air of achievement to accept the theatrical illusion also accepts the glamour of New York with its "stage properties": the red velvet carpet leading to the door of the hotel, the boys in livery, the orchestra playing the Blue Danube at dinner, carnations and champagne and purple dinner-coats. And he dies for these things, because he will not acknowledge reality and a need to return to his own world.

While Paul escapes from the modern world of monotony and business through art, and ultimately through death, the narrator faces the irony of "Paul's Case". The Song of the Lark, too, does not evade the tensions and complexities of life, for while Thea sacrifices her everyday life to art, the sacrifice is clearly evident. In her art, she finds a refuge from routine and from human relationships; as Cather points out in the preface:

Her artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real. . . . The harassed, susceptible human creature comes and goes, subject to colds, brokers, dressmakers, managers. But the free creature, who retains her youth and beauty and warm imagination, is kept shut up in the closet, along with the scores and wigs.²⁰³

Her art does become a form of sanctuary, and Cather indicates clearly that through it, she escapes from the life she might have been destined

for in Moonstone; the book chronicles Thea's

escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance. . . . What I cared and still care about, was the girl's escape; the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from Commonness.²⁰⁴

While A Lost Lady and One of Ours deal with the negation of art in modern America, The Professor's House faces squarely the issue of the artist's loss, and in the end, the Professor's tragedy lies in his recognition that he is unable to escape through art from the dilemma of society, brought into the life of his own family. His lecture to his students indicates his belief in the position of art and religion (which he equates) as providing for man "the only happiness he has ever had". While science diminishes the stature of man and distracts him with toys, art and religion create an illusion of importance:

As long as every man and woman who crowded into the cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principle in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing. . . . And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own individual little lives.²⁰⁵

In a sense his study has always been a sanctuary, for here in the past he has been able to evade the problems and annoyances of everyday life, and his happy memories of his family are coloured by the joy with which he approached his artistic writings. The child Kathleen once sat outside his door for several hours, waiting patiently so as not to interrupt his work, her little fingers red and swollen from bee-stings. Once more the Professor tries to use his art as a refuge, refusing an invitation to spend the summer in Europe with his wife, Louis and Rosamond:

He could simply insist that he must work, and that he couldn't

work away from his old study. There were some advantages about being a writer of histories. The desk was a shelter one could hide behind, it was a hole one could creep into.²⁰⁶

Yet he comes to realize that the study no longer cuts him off from the problems of everyday life and human relationships. Kathleen intrudes to bring news: Scott's blackballing of Louie from the Arts and Science Club, Augusta's trust in questionable bank stock and her financial disaster, Rosamond's refusal to help her. He is faced with Kathleen's jealousy of Rosamond's home and furs, with Crane's jealousy of his own position. And in this recognition, he finds his couch a "refuge from this ever-increasing fatigue", a symbol of the final hard bed where death itself becomes the final resolution of the problems of life: "a release from every obligation, from every form of effort".²⁰⁷ While his ultimate rejection of suicide implies his resignation, and his determination ^{to} accept life on its own terms and to "face with fortitude the Berengaria [with the returning Marcelluses] and the future"²⁰⁸, he will live on "without joy" and without the art which brings this joy. Although Cather here faces her dilemma and rejects art as a refuge, her decision requires the death of art itself.

In her own life, Cather did not accept the terms of the Professor to live in the future. She returns to the art and attempts to construct her own world through losing herself in the past, and the safe, slow, almost unchanging world of the frontier where there is no urbanism and no industrialism to challenge the patterns of a life still basically agricultural. Yet this escape too is only temporary; the Catholic religion is not an answer to the problems posed in The Professor's House and ultimately art itself provides only a temporary

refuge. Finally she admitted:

No faith, she feared, could save one from the great spiritual duality of our time--the conflict between the brave ideals of our pioneer ancestors, and the mounting materialism of our post-war world. The creative writer, we were agreed, has a momentary refuge from the duality that pulls modern man or woman apart but it lasts only for the absorbed duration of the work in which he is engaged. Then comes the dismal moment when the book goes to press--one has produced a dead thing, it seems. How does one deal with the soul, lamenting and tortured? The book will not give the answer.²⁰⁹

In this phase of her life, Cather has looked to art to satisfy her sense of beauty, order and meaning in life, as she had looked to nature previously. Her artists share qualities in common with her pioneers: both are individuals, set apart from the common, with a yearning for order and beauty which the first translate into works of art, (or fail to translate, as in Claude's case) and the second into controlling and subduing nature. They are both idealists and dreamers, courageous and strong.²¹⁰ The natural frontier was conquered in 1890 but the frontier of art is illimitable. As Trilling suggests:

The disappearance of the old frontier left Miss Cather with a heritage of the virtues in which she had been bred, but with the necessity of finding a new object for them. Looking for the new frontier, she found it in the mind. . . for in art one may desire illimitably. And if, conceivably, one may fail--Miss Cather's artists never do--it is still only as an artist that one may be the eternal pioneer, concerned always with the "idea of things".²¹¹

Why then does the world of the artist cease to exist for Cather after 1925? Perhaps Leon Edel's comment in "The Paradox of Success" suggests one answer:

This fascination for art, and the art world, on the part of Miss Cather's heroes and heroines, was a fascination essentially with success; the energy represented is not aesthetic, it is that of conquest; of overcoming nature and competition and standing firm and free among the Philistines and resisting their inevitable demands that talent become as mediocre as themselves. Miss Cather's

central theme is that of people who pull themselves up by their bootstraps. . . . [That is why in The Song of the Lark] the story has nowhere to go.²¹²

Edel parallels the Professor's disillusionment with success to Cather's own. Yet this still will not explain Cather's complete withdrawal after The Professor's House. Clearly, her search in nature and art for the answers to her problems has not been satisfactory, and she turns to religion to find fulfilment and security. While the artist is still a central figure, he exists no longer in the present but in the past, an unreal figure who enjoys the best of both the aesthetic and the religious worlds, and seeks his quest through the framework of order and ritual provided by the Catholic Church. The world of art has died for Cather with the sunset of the pioneer.

6. ALEXANDER'S BRIDGE

Alexander's Bridge, Willa Cather's first novel or, more accurately, novelette, is an interesting and complex work which deals with the revelation of one character alone, and which anticipates, not the works O Pioneers! and My Ántonia which follow it directly, but The Song of the Lark and the much later ^{The} Professor's House of which it is a pre-study. For it is, too, a "Portrait of the Artist" and Alexander is as truly^{an} artistic character as Thea Kronberg and Professor St. Peter, although he creates bridges instead of operas or histories. Through Alexander, Cather comes to the recognition that "it is in middle life that the complex man cannot evade his psychological fate",¹ although for Cather, not yet forty, the struggle is still impersonal. And the tragedy of Alexander is that he sacrifices his art for life and youth; as Lord Henry says in The Picture of Dorian Grey: "The tragedy of old age is not that one is old but that one is young".²

Later, after the successes of O Pioneers! and My Ántonia, Cather was to reject this first work as contrived, developed from external circumstances by the intellect, rather than evolved from experience by intuition (vii).³ She admits that the subject and technique are Jamesian, and affirms that the real author does not need literary precedents, but will find his work already moulded and his technique by instinct as "our feet find the road home on a dark night" (vii). Yet Cather is dealing here with one of her central themes, the role

of the artist in society, and despite certain weakness in plotting and technique, she is presenting in an effective form the failure of the artist in the modern world.⁴

The central weakness of Alexander's Bridge, as has been pointed out by most critics, is the connection of Bartley Alexander's tragic fall with his divided mind.⁵ In context, the destruction of the bridge and Alexander's "fall" (both literal and metaphoric) comes not as a result of character but by chance, for Alexander never receives the telegraph sent to warn him that the supports are giving, although he is just where he is expected to be, in his office. His relationship to Hilda is incidental to the collapse of the bridge. Moreover, this collapse is the fault not of Alexander but of modern society, which has insisted on compromise and cheapness in design and materials (55).⁶ In later years Cather would have indicated more clearly the connection of these causes, if not directly then through image patterns and the juxtaposition of incidents. But then later she would not have written the same novel. We must overlook this discrepancy in logic if we wish to see in Alexander's fall what Cather herself saw at the time of writing, even though she later denied the work. And we must as well overlook certain awkwardnesses in technique, such as the shifting use of narrator from omniscient to third-person at beginning and end, where Cather is perfecting her technique of the narrator to be handled more successfully in My Ántonia and after.⁷

Like James' The American, The Ambassador and The Portrait of a Lady, the centre of Alexander's Bridge lies in the development, or rather the revelation, of the protagonist, his discovery of himself.

This development is achieved through Alexander's relationship to the other characters of the novel,^{to} Lucius Wilson (who functions at times as a third-person narrator), to his wife Winnifred, and to his mistress, Hilda Burgoyne; we see him from each of these angles for, as Wilson observes, "No relation is so complete that it can hold absolutely all of a person" (110). The "plot" is contrived; like Professor St. Peter, Alexander is brought into contact with his former self, although this occurs in actuality in the form of Hilda Burgoyne, rather than through memory. But the centre of the novel is the quest of the artist, for Alexander, although he is an engineer, is given the characteristics of the artist, and the novel concerns his quest for self, a quest which leads to the rejection of home and security, of comfort and society for a dedication to the true self, although it leads him not towards but away from his art. He becomes too the artist as exile, for his choice of life and love leads to his tragic fall and the doom of his compromised art. Yet these elements do not emerge clearly in the novel; they are mixed with other concerns and ideas.

Alexander is identified as the artist by Lucius Wilson who indicates "[he] belongs to the people who make the play, and most of us are only on-lookers at best" (111). Although he is an engineer and not a painter, a writer or sculptor, Cather here does not distinguish between art and technics. Alexander is a Maker in the original sense of "craft"; he "builds the bridges into the future over which the feet of every one of us will go" (14). His art, then, is symbolic, a form of communication among men and an agent for the journey which

each man must take in life.⁸ Through his art, Alexander controls and subdues nature, shaping it to order and utility, even to beauty.

Physically, he is a superman, an almost mythical figure who combines the powers of the pioneer, the artist, and the god:

He looked as a tamer of rivers ought to look. Under his tumbled sandy hair his head seemed as hard and powerful as a catapult, and his shoulders looked strong enough in themselves to support a span of any one of his ten great bridges that cut the air above as many rivers. (7)

The ability of the Romantic artist to live more intensely than those around him, Alexander possesses. Again it is Wilson who points out his "tremendous response to stimuli", his living to capacity each individual moment: "No past, not future for Bartley; just the fiery moment. The only moment that ever is or ever will be in the world" (6-7). This force of life can be explained only in artistic terms: "You can't get at the young Bartley except by means of colour" (13). And his effect on those who respond to this force is dynamic, like Thea's effect on Harsanyi and Tom's on the Professor: "His old pupil always stimulated him at first, and then vastly wearied him. The machinery was always pounding away in this man" (10).⁹

Alexander is an idealist and a dreamer; he lives with visions but when these visions are translated into fact, he like the Professor, is unsatisfied and yearns for something beyond. Although he is popular in his own society, and among his men, he too is essentially isolated from those around, even from Winnifred and Hilda, both of whom love but neither of whom understand him. He writes to Hilda that while his friends live on quiet streets of Boston, "all safe and at peace with themselves", he is "always on the edge of danger and change" (83).

And like the Professor, he recognizes that even love will not bridge the gap between individuals, that each is essentially alone: "Two people, when they love each other, grow alike in their tastes and habits and pride, but their moral natures. . . are never welded" (82-3).¹⁰

The secret of Bartley's fall lies in his character, which has changed little from that of the youth remembered by Lucius Wilson. Wilson's premonition of a "tragic flaw" is too obviously contrived, and its relation to Alexander's actual death is tenuous:

I always used to feel that there was a weak spot where some day strain would tell. Even after you began to climb. . . . The more dazzling the front you presented, the higher your facade rose, the more I expected to see a big crack zigzagging from top to bottom. . . then a crash and clouds of dust. (9)

Wilson now denies this: "I don't feel it any longer, I am sure of you" (10). But Cather has succeeded in suggesting that Bartley, like Othello and Lear, carries the seeds of his tragedy within himself. And although his death too seems contrived, it is integral to his failure as an artist to live for his art:

Fortune, which had smiled upon him consistently all his life, did not desert him in the end. His harshest critics did not doubt that, had he lived, he would have retrieved himself. Even Lucius Wilson did not see in this accident the disaster he had once foretold. . . . [But] the mind that society had come to regard as a powerful and reliable machine, dedicated to its service, may for a long time have been sick within itself and bent upon its own destruction. (106)

Alexander's quest comes to a climax in his train journey towards the doomed bridge; as he is travelling on the overnight train, he sees a group of boys camped on the banks of the river, crouching around their little wood fire. The memory which it evokes of his own youth

and his idealism brings him to the crisis of decision:

He shuddered and looked about him at the poor unconscious companions of his journey, unkempt and travel-stained, now doubled in unlovely attitudes, who had come to stand to him for the ugliness he had brought into the world. And those boys back there, beginning it all again just as he had begun it; he wished he could promise them luck. Ah, if one could promise any one better luck, if one could assure a single human of happiness! He had thought he could do so, once. (96)

It is not made clear how Alexander has produced these transient companions or been responsible for their ugliness, but it is connected somehow to his first bridge: "He did not like coming and going across that bridge, or remembering the man who built it" (94). Through his art in engineering, he has made possible the journey of these fellow passengers, and he takes upon himself responsibility for their condition. Their quest is pointless and dreary, as opposed to the dreams of the boys on the sandbar, and in some manner he has actively contributed to the mechanistic society which has made them ugly and machine-bound; they lack the youth, vigour and expectancy of the boys who will some day grow up to discover that life will give them nothing greater than their youth.

At the centre of the novel is the choice which Alexander is forced to make between Winnifred, his wife, and Hilda, his mistress, and this choice involves too a decision between Boston and London, America and Europe, ultimately age and youth. Ironically here it is the Old World which suggests morning and youthfulness, the New, sterility and a serene emptiness in a reversal of Cather's *later* associations.

The centre of Alexander's life in Boston is Winnifred, whose personality has provided the serenity and balance which he has required

for his art. It is she who arranged his study overlooking the Cambridge Embankment, as Wilson describes for us:

Wilson felt at once the harmony of beautiful things that have lived long together without intrusions of ugliness or change. . . those warm consonances of colour had been blending and mellowing before he was born. But. . . it all seemed to glow like the inevitable background for his vigor and vehemence. (7-8)

This is the room Alexander is later to describe: "I have been happier in this room than anywhere else in the world" (82). The house we first see at sunset when the boughs are still bare after winter. Although there is the moist smell of woodsmoke, the accent is upon serenity and reminiscence rather than the promise of new life:

The wide back windows looked out upon the garden and the sunset and a fine stretch of silver-coloured river. A harp-shaped elm stood stripped against the pale-coloured evening sky, with ragged last year's bird's nests in its forks, and through the bare branches the evening star quivered in the misty air. The long brown room breathed the peace of a rich and amply guarded quiet. (30)*

Wilson returns to the house the next evening at the same time "when the river was beginning to redden under the declining sun" (13). The room represents the order and serenity which Winnifred has brought to Bartley's life, and its personality reflects her own; gracious, serene, calm, warm and yet, as Wilson notes, a trifle "hard". At Christmas, the greens and the red, pink and white of the azaleas enforce the sense of warmth in contrast to the frozen masses of ice floating in the river outside and the stormy afternoon, and this warmth Wilson attributes directly to Winnifred: "Happy people do a great deal for their friends" (54). In her youth, Winnifred has "loved life" (14) and still Wilson notes about her "the suggestion of stormy possibilities in the proud curve of her lip and nostril" (6). Yet this is latent

*Italics mine.

only; he describes her as "a person of distinction", handsome and tall with beautiful head and carriage, and behind her, the atmosphere of the salon: "One immediately took for granted the costly privileges and fine spaces that must lie in the background from which such a figure could emerge" (2). Although a musician herself of professional calibre, she has given up most of her music for Alexander to give him a home "full of dear familiar things which spoke to him of so many happy years" (57).¹¹ She provides the social life, entertaining for him "charming people, who liked and admired him" (57). Yet even Wilson notes that behind her surface warmth is a certain coldness and reserve, and Alexander admires her expression which he finds "very, very proud, and just a little hard" (57).¹² And in his relation to her Alexander feels within him a foreboding. Something sullen and powerful "wrung and tortured him", and he gazes into the darkness of the Cambridge river below with "the feeling that he would never escape" (58).

In contrast to Winnifred, Hilda Burgoyne represents the immediacy and joy of summer, of life as opposed to death. Although she too is an artist, it is her vitality and freshness, her associations with his lost youth which Alexander feels rather than her art: "he walked shoulder to shoulder with a shadowy companion--not little Hilda Burgoyne, by any means, but someone vastly dearer to himself than she had ever been--his own young self" (34).¹³ For Hilda symbolizes youth and morning. When he reaches Hilda's apartment she meets him, "fresh as the morning itself. Her rooms were flooded with sunshine and full of the flowers he had been sending her" (74). She is frequently associated with yellow in repeated references to her

primrose dress and slippers (35, 37-8, 41, 48), to her yellow irises (42), and her dry yellow Rhone wine (44-5), as well as to spring in the spray of lilacs (43-4) and his first view of her apartment, the window-boxes full of flowers (29).

Her vitality is connected as well with her background; for London itself is associated for Bartley with spring and youth: "London always makes me want to live more than any other city in the world" (77). Walking among the fountains of Trafalgar Square and the colour and gaiety of Piccadilly he observes: "The parks were full of children and nurse-maids and joyful dogs that leaped and yelped and scratched up the brown earth with their claws" (75). Even its sunsets are active and vibrant, unlike the serene evenings of Cambridge, and in their light the Houses of Parliament seem to "catch fire":

The yellow light poured through the trees and the leaves seemed to burn with soft fires. There was a smell of acacias in the air everywhere and the laburnams were dripping gold over the walls of the gardens. It was a sweet, lonely kind of summer evening. (30)

Returning one evening from Richmond to find the spires of London in a glorious golden haze under pink and amber clouds, Hilda claims that the mood of Londoners is like that of their city, grey for many days but in fair weather "mad with joy" (76). In this world, death seems impossible and life "the strongest and most indestructible thing in the world" (78). And Hilda asks:

Do you really believe that all those people rushing about down there, going to good dinners and clubs and theatres, will be dead some day and not care about anything? I don't believe it, and I know I shan't die, ever! (78)

Even his memories of the British Museum, which represents death, cannot dampen the joys of youth, and only accentuate the thrill of

life in the bright summer days outside, the activities of the pigeons and the young lovers themselves:

Bartley had always thought of the British Museum as the ultimate repository of mortality, where all the dead things in the world were assembled to make one hour of youth the more precious. . . . How one hid his youth under his coat and hugged it! And how good it was to turn one's back upon all that vaulted cold, to take Hilda's arm and hurry out of the great door and down the steps into the sunlight among the pigeons--to know that the warm and vital thing within him was still there and had not been snatched away to flush Caesar's lean cheek or to feed the veins of some bearded Assyrian king. They in their day had carried the flaming liquor, but today was his! So the song used to run in his head those summer mornings a dozen years ago. (28-9)

These hazy memories are subsumed into one incident which forecasts the future tragedy. One spring evening Bartley and Hilda gave to a beggar woman a franc and a spray of lilac. But it was not their wealth but their youth and love that she envied, and her blessing "God give you a happy love" has a note of foreboding: "It had come out of the depth of the poor creature's sorrow, vibrating with pity for their youth and despair at the terribleness of human life; it had the anguish of a voice of prophecy (46). The renewed relationship with Hilda fulfills this prophecy; Alexander recognizes that it is not Hilda in herself who is his companion but the young Bartley, but "It was not until long afterward that Alexander learned that for him this youth was the most dangerous of companions" (34).¹⁵

Alexander's real tragedy then is his failure to distinguish between past and present, youth and middle-age, promise and accomplishment.¹⁶ His memories become more real than his present, and his lost youth, more important than his successes: "how glorious it had been and how quickly it had passed; and, when it had passed, how little

worthwhile anything was. None of the things he had gained in the least compensated"(31). And for this youth, Alexander sacrifices his art and the society around him which has drained him of his energy, made him into a machine (33). His life has become "a network of great and little details"(32), details which "drink you dry. Your life keeps going for things you don't want, and all the while you are being built alive into a social structure you don't care a rap about" (10). The society which buries him alive has become his enemy as well as the "dead calm of middle age" which he fears:

It was like being buried alive. . . . He remembered how, when he was a little boy. . . he used to leap from his bed into the full consciousness of himself. That consciousness was life itself. Whatever took its place, action, reflection, the power of concentrated thought, were only functions of a mechanism useful to society; things which could be bought in the market. There was only one thing which had an absolute value for each individual, and it was just that original impulse, that internal heat, that feeling of oneself in one's own breast. (32-3)

The final choice is marked by the opening of the New Year in Cambridge with thaw, fog and rain which reflects the mood of Alexander, watching the "storm-beaten river" (59) and the "melancholy dripping black horses" (60). The trip across the Atlantic to Hilda anticipates his death; as he watches the "low dirty sky" and listens to the "beating of the heavy rain upon the iron-coloured sea" (61), he is absorbed into the forces of Nature, returning like the Professor to the very elements of existence:

The great open spaces made him passive and the restlessness of the water quieted him. . . . He was submerged in the vast impersonal greyness about him, and at intervals the sidelong roll of the boat measured off time like the ticking of a clock. He felt released from everything that troubled and perplexed him. . . . [He] sat smoking, losing himself in the obliterating blackness and drowsing in the rush of the gale. (61-2)

Here Alexander again is caught between love and death, the elemental forces of nature and the power of human emotion. Just before his death, he contemplates the meaning of life and the two forces which dominate it, recalling his courtship of Winnifred near his first bridge:

And always there was the sound of rushing water underneath, the sound which, more than anything, meant death; the wearing away of things under the impact of physical forces which men could direct but never circumvent or diminish. Then, in the exaltation of love, more than ever it seemed to him to mean death, the only other thing as strong as love. Under the moon, under the cold, splendid stars, there were only those two things awake and sleepless; death and love, the rushing river and his burning heart. (95)¹⁷

In the end, Alexander chooses death ~~over~~ love and art. Although he is in a sense the victim of chance, and of society, falling with his own bridge which has been built from cheap materials, he could have been saved by Winnifred as he recognizes; but she cannot protect him from Hilda who is really himself:

He knew he should live to tell her and to recover all he had lost. Now, at last, he felt sure of himself. He was not startled. It seemed to him that he had been through something of this sort before. There was nothing horrible about it. This, too, was life, and life was activity, just as it was in Boston or London There was something he wanted to tell his wife, but he could not think clearly for the roaring in his ears. Suddenly he remembered what it was. He caught his breath, and then she let him go. (101-2)

In this sense, his death is not by chance but a working out of the forces within himself. Like Professor St. Peter who contemplates suicide, he rejects the design and order of the universe, the activity and positiveness of the moment and of his art, for the past and a youth which he has irretrievably lost. He rejects the meaning of art and he can no longer live. Although the tragedy of Alexander does

not emerge clearcut from the confusion of causes, he suggests the theme of man as fallen and guilty of his fall.

Yet the morning of his death is a spring morning of rebirth; the sun rises through "pale golden ripples of cloud":

The fresh yellow light was vibrating through the pine woods. The white birches with their little unfolding leaves, gleamed in the lowlands, and the marsh meadows were already coming to life with their first green, a thin, bright colour which had run over them like fire. As the train rushed along the trestles, thousands of wild birds rose screaming into the light. The sky was already a pale blue and of the clearness of crystal. . . . [Alexander] drew into his lungs deep breaths of the pine-scented air. He had awakened with all his old sense of power. (96-7)

His death becomes the reuniting of his two selves, youth and middle-age, the artist and the man; it is a rite of purification, and although he dies, he dies with a sense of peace. The ending suggests the importance of his life to those around him, Lucius Wilson, Winnifred and Hilda. For he can be possessed in death by all who knew him in a way he could never be in life; he is owned completely by Winnifred and Hilda too, and he comes to represent the whole experience of life and art: "Nothing can happen to one after Bartley" (112).

Alexander's Bridge, then, although it is Cather's first novel and later virtually disowned by her, does contain an early statement of art which will recur in the work of Cather's middle period: The Song of the Lark and The Professor's House. It anticipates too the problems of the artist in the modern world and the Professor's rejection of an art which means nothing to the machine-society of the present, for in many senses Alexander is a study for the later fuller portrait of Professor St. Peter. But before this, Cather will take up in The Song of the Lark the theme of the successful artist, the singer

who can give something to her society which it can value and appreciate. Bartley Alexander dies, but the issue is not yet personal, and Cather, not yet in her forties, still faces the present and her search for order in art.

7. THE SONG OF THE LARK

Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires.
The world is little, people are little, human life is
little. There is only one big thing--desire. (95)¹

The Song of the Lark is Willa Cather's "Portrait of the Artist".

It is unique in Cather's fiction, for it provides the only fully realized treatment of the artist and is the one mature novel which deals with the life of art. Alexander's Bridge is slight and immature. Although the central character is an artist too, his tragic fall is not related to his vision of art or to his character but is a result of Fate. One of Ours, A Lost Lady, and The Professor's House deal with the failure of the artistic vision in modern America. Claude must go to France for culture and to satisfy his desire for the artistic life; Marian Forrester cannot survive the loss of pioneer values and becomes vulgarized by modern society; Professor St. Peter comes to reject art in his total rejection of life. He must live on in an age where there is no joy, no meaning, and where Tom Outland cannot exist. The Song of the Lark, then, bears the burden of interpreting Cather's personal artistic vision as this is embodied in fictional form. In it, nature and art become one, almost a religion, and religion per se does not exist except as it presents the sterility and negation of the non-art world.

The novel was originally entitled "Artist's Youth" and Cather explains in the Preface of 1932 that she changed this to satisfy her publisher. "The Song of the Lark" refers to a painting

in the Chicago Art Institute of a peasant girl who stops to listen to a lark on her way to work in the fields; and was chosen "to suggest a young girl's awakening to something beautiful" (v). The theme Cather interprets as "an artist's awakening and struggle; her floundering escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied, provincial world of utter ignorance" (vi). The central character Thea Kronberg reflects in part Cather's recreation of Olive Fremstad whom Cather met when she was assigned by McClure's Magazine to write an article on the lives of three singers, Louise Homer, Geraldine Farrar, and Olive Fremstad; In part she represents Cather's own childhood and artistic development. Fremstad admired the novel exceedingly:

It was the only book about an artist where there was "something doing" in the artist, and . . . she did not know where Willa ended and she began! . . . [She] declared she was infatuated with it, and said that even the ending had the right tone.²

Cather herself was so involved in the novel that Sergeant tells us she did not dare to criticize it, and when it was published, Cather felt "the pang and emptiness of one deserted".³

The defects in the novel are immediately apparent, and obscure its many virtues.⁴ Cather herself admitted a structural problem in her 1932 Preface, but attributed this to the wrong causes, blaming it upon the "descending curve" of the last section, "Kronberg":

The life of a successful artist in the full tide of achievement is not so interesting as the life of a talented young girl 'fighting her way', as we say. Success is never so interesting as struggle--not even to the successful (v).

Since the theme of the novel is the artist's awakening to beauty and her escape from provincialism and the shallow culture of America, Cather now claimed that she should have told only of this escape, and

used a technique of suggestion for the last part. While this would undoubtedly strengthen the novel, Cather's original intention for this part is valid: to contrast the everyday life of the singer with the fullness of her art, the weakness of the human creature with the youth and beauty of her creation (vi). The real problem here is not structural but interpretive, and is caused by the separation of the heroine into her two original components, Cather and Fremstad, as Elizabeth Sergeant immediately perceived. The first part of the novel Sergeant felt was almost perfect in itself:

[W]here the imprint of her own passion fell, I was enthralled and convinced. . . . Had the novel ended here, Thea's story might be accounted one of the perfect works of Willa Cather, rather than the imperfect, paradoxical thing it became when she tried to join the finality of her own childhood experience to the more vicariously apprehended life of a mature artist in the great field of singing. . . . The something final, dry and ruthless that happened to the mature diva far removed her from the intense, passionate, richly endowed child and girl, and reduced the male figures on whose admiration she depended, to understructure for a stage figure.⁵

Cather herself seems to be aware of this for she narrates the final section through Dr. Archie, thus introducing in effect a third person narrator into an omniscient author technique. Fred Ottenburg prepares us for this distancing: "We've all changed, my dear Archie--she more than most of us" (484) and Archie himself finds: "He had, after all, missed her. Whatever was there, she was not there--for him. . . . This woman he had never known" (499-500). But this does not excuse the omniscient narrator. In truth Cather is here unable to handle the situation she has introduced⁶; her knowledge of the life of a singer is based only on hearsay and she is never able to convey situations which she has not herself experienced. Thus she is

correct in suggesting that she should have handled the final section in a different manner, not because of the inherent nature of the material itself, but because of her own limitations.

But the structure of the novel has other defects which critics have been quick to point out. Brown calls it "a typical massive Entwicklungsroman" in the tradition of Clayhanger and the early Dreiser⁷ and Van Ghent notes that the author's autobiographic compulsion and its naturalistic, circumstantial form results in inverted plot situations, sagging proportions, made-up dialogue, and frequently lax prose.⁸ Randall complains that in the last three hundred pages, the artist in Thea is stated but never demonstrated: "her greatness is never shown but talked about ad nauseam".⁹ As we have observed, the point of view is inconsistent, shifting from an omniscient narrator to the occasional use of Dr. Archie as third-person narrator, and the very awkward handling of Henry Biltmer in "The Ancient People" to describe the relationship of Fred and Thea. Again Fred Ottenburg's marital entanglements are concealed from us at the beginning, and then revealed by the omniscient narrator late in Part IV, although Thea herself does not learn of this entanglement until several months later; we do not either learn of the situation from the beginning, nor come to a recognition of it through Thea's consciousness.¹⁰

The incidents too seem to be chosen arbitrarily, and the structure lax, the plot like the "tapeworm" of Forster, connecting characters and events only through chronology.¹¹ It does not have the emotional unity of My Ántonia or of Death Comes for the Archbishop, whose structure has been compared to beads on a string.¹² Many of the

incidents seem to be chosen for their relationship to the author's life, which here is not coincident with the life of the main character as in My Ántonia; the facets of everyday life are interesting in themselves, but they do not explain the character that Thea becomes, as for example Lena Lingard's family life explains her interest in art and her avoidance of domestic entanglements. Cather herself later said that the "full-bodied method" is not truly her own, and that naturalistic detail might have been replaced by a tighter structure.¹³ Lambert notes the frequent intrusion of auctorial comment and the lengthy explanation of background for minor characters.¹⁴ And Cather occasionally resorts to such verbal clichés as "of one of these [men] we shall have more to say" (39).

Yet The Song of the Lark has its interests as well. The structure is not actually as lax as it appears, for many of the situations in Part I and II do relate clearly to Thea's development as an artist, although their importance is obscured by the weighting of irrelevant detail. Thea's lessons with Wunsch, her relations with Spanish Johnny and the Mexicans, her competition at the church concert, her closeness to nature and the desert around, her conflict with her family, in particular with her father and Anna, her daily routine in Chicago which includes the dreariness of her accommodations and the sterility of the church atmosphere still surrounding her, her response to culture at the Art Institute, in Dvorák's New World Symphony and Wagner, at the Nathanmeyer's: all these are part of her artistic development and her emergence from her chrysalis.

The novel too is Cather's fullest challenge to the modern

world. Both O Pioneers! and My Ántonia resolve in nostalgia for a lost past, and in My Ántonia this mood is sufficiently important that it becomes a major theme in the sub-title "Optima dies. . . prima fugit". After 1922, the artist cannot face America and can no longer create in its environment. In The Song of the Lark however the past, both personal and national, is only important insofar as it provides in inspiration for the art of the present. While Dr. Archie anticipates Jim Burden as the romantic and nostalgic figure yearning for a lost innocence, Thea herself absorbs only what she requires for rest or recreation, and rejects this nostalgia. She leaves the Cliff-dwellers because they are static and unchanging "tired of the desert and the dead races, of a world without change or ideas" (408). And she asserts that life demands a dedication and an acceptance of challenge, even though man fears this unknown future:

I don't think I could go back. The past closes up behind one, somehow. One would rather have a new kind of misery. The old kind seems like death or unconsciousness. You can't force your life back into that mould again. No, one can't go back (411).

Thea draws on the past only as a source of strength for the present, to recreate her energies: "They save me: the old things, things like the Kohler's garden. I try all the new things, and then go back to the old" (551) and again "Nearly all my dreams, except those about breaking down or missing trains, are about Moonstone. . . . All the old furniture and the worn spots in the carpet--it rests my mind to go over them" (549).¹⁵ Yet these are kept in their place. Dr. Archie's reappearance out of her past reminds her of her disappointments, her freedom, her love of the sun and the blue sky, yet she must retain

these only as memories: "They had nothing to do with the struggle that made her actual life" (514-5). Here then, Cather rejects the past for the world of the present and the future. The artist must face this future, must recognize "one can't go back" (411), for the failure to realize this leads to sterility in art and its eventual death, as Cather comes to understand in The Professor's House.

In The Song of the Lark, Cather creates the artist who is strong enough to escape from his environment, to assert his will against the shallow and empty cultural inheritance of the West, and even of America itself, and to seek only the true and the beautiful. At one point in her Preface, written in 1932, Cather effectually denies the will of her artist:

What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape; the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from commonness. She seemed wholly at the mercy of accident; but to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen. (vi)

The novel itself suggests that the play of chance is stronger than the will of the protagonist:

Only by the merest chance had she ever got to Panther Canyon. There was certainly no kindly Providence that directed one's life; and one's parents did not in the least care what became of one, so long as one did not misbehave and endanger their comfort. One's life was at the mercy of blind chance. She had better take it in her own hands and lose everything. (382)

In truth, Thea's escape is not due to blind chance but to the manipulation of the author who arranges that Ray Kennedy shall die and leave her his life insurance, that she will meet Fred Ottenburg, the beer millionaire who sends her to Panther Canyon, that Dr. Archie shall be able to realize five or six thousand dollars on mining stock to

send Thea to Germany to study, and later that he will become a rich speculator in mining stock.¹⁶ Thea's statement indicates not only her own selfishness, her own blindness to her fortune and to the self-sacrifice of Ray, Dr. Archie, Fred, even her mother, but also Cather's blindness to Thea's situation. For she effectually contradicts her own statement of Fate when she adds, "to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen" (vi). The novel would be structurally more effective if Thea herself had earned her way to Chicago and to Panther Canyon, if we had observed her labour to repay Dr. Archie. In One of Ours, Cather turns to consider the other side of the problem; Claude has the honesty if not the vitality, and represents those to whom fortunate accidents do not always happen.

Despite these occasional references, The Song of the Lark does bear out Cather's premise that the true artist creates his own fate, that he challenges his environment and conquers it. For the artist must have faith; he must have desire: "There is only one big thing--desire" (45).

The Artist in Nature: "the earliest sources of gladness" (369)

The role of nature in the novels whose centre of order is art differs considerably from that of the novels of nature; it is no longer a source of meaning for life, but a source of inspiration for the artist, no longer primary but secondary. In O Pioneers!, My Ántonia and "Neighbour Rosicky", the artists move back to the land in search of an order for life, rejecting the culture of the cities and

the East for the love of the land. In The Song of the Lark, One of Ours, The Professor's House, the movement is reversed, and the artist must seek his career away from the land he loves, in Europe, the East, even the University towns of the Midwest. His relationship to nature remains vital, but it is a relationship which can exist in memory or in occasional contact rather than in complete absorption in nature. These novels then reflect the movement of Cather's own life, and The Song of the Lark in particular conveys the tension Cather felt between West and East, between her early life on the prairie and her chosen life in New York. Cather solved her dilemma by frequent journeys west to visit her parents, and by her summer home in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where she found the continuity with the soil which she sensed in the cliff cities: "there man and nature and earth were one".¹⁷ Thea solves this by her return in memory to Moonstone, and her use of nature as a source of strength for the present in the manner of Wordsworth, to "flash upon the inward eye".¹⁸ Even before the death of Ray, she feels the pull of the unknown world beyond Moonstone and Denver:

She ran for a long while about the white, moonlit streets, looking up at the stars and the bluish night, at the quiet houses sunk in black shade, the glittering sandhills. She loved the familiar trees, and the people in those little houses, and she loved the unknown world beyond Denver. She felt as if she were being pulled in two, between the desire to go away for ever and the desire to stay forever. She had only twenty years--no time to lose. (177)

Yet she too like Cather finds the prairie paradoxically claustrophobic. After her return from Chicago the first summer, she recognizes that the love of nature must be controlled, that she cannot like

Wunsch desire only to be buried under Mrs. Kohler's linden trees (29):
 "Suppose she never got away again, after all. . . . The desert was
 so big and thirsty; if one's foot slipped, it could drink one up
 like a drop of water" (309).¹⁹

In the first part of The Song of the Lark, Thea is closely associated with the nature around Moonstone. The name of the novel itself associates the awakening of art with a sense of the beauty in nature, the song of the lark with the early morning and the child in the fields. Like Keats' nightingale, the lark is a symbol both of nature and of art. And Thea's voice, her love of beauty, is the product both of her talent and of her individual environment in Moonstone which merge together to produce the operatic singer Kronberg. Thea is closely associated with her natural background, by Harsanyi who observes she is "like a horse, like a tree!" (256) and by Wunsch who sees her wet from the weeds she has been running through and with the tall sunflowers behind her: "she was like a flower full of sun, but not the soft German flowers of his childhood, . . . the yellow prickly-pear blossoms that open there in the desert; thornier and sturdier" (122).

Thea's relationship to nature is intense in the early section of the novel. However these associations are given no order or pattern, and frequently the descriptions seem incidental to the narrative rather than organic to the development of the central character and the mood of the novel as in My Ántonia. Thea's strong impression of the land is conveyed in Part III when she returns to Moonstone gladly, tired of the world of society and pseudo-art in Chicago:

This earth seemed to her young and fresh and kindly, a place where refugees from old, sad countries were given another chance. The mere absence of rocks gave the soil a kind of amiability and generosity, and the absence of natural boundaries gave the spirit a wider range. . . . It was over flat lands like this, stretching out to drink the sun, that the larks sang--and one's heart sang there, too. . . . Its song had nothing to do with words; it was like the light rain of the desert at noon, or the smell of the sagebrush after rain; intangible but powerful. She had the sense of going back to a friendly soil, whose friendship was somehow going to strengthen her; a naive, generous country that gave one its joyous force. (276-7) ²⁰

Moonstone itself is set in the midst of the desert, "a frail, brightly painted desert town. . . shaded by the light-reflecting, wind-loving trees of the desert, whose roots are always seeking water and whose leaves are always talking about it" (46). In the moonlight, the plain beyond the edge of town is white: "every clump of sage stood out distinct from the sand, and the dunes looked like a shining lake" (51). Under the sun:

Every particle of mica in the soil flashed like a little mirror, and the glare from the plain below seemed more intense than the rays from above. The sand ridges ran glittering gold out to where the mirage licked them up, shining and steaming like a lake in the tropics. The sky looked like blue lava, forever incapable of clouds--a turquoise bowl that was the lid of the desert. (93)

We see the desert most clearly through Ray Kennedy's expedition to the "Turquoise Hills" which represents to Thea an escape from the narrow boundaries of the little town into "boundless freedom" (59), the entry of man into the world of nature of the rabbit and the sagehen. Yet the mirages on the desert relate the present moment to its past history, the little life of man to the overall cycle of life and death in nature, time and eternity:

Here and there one saw reflected the image of a heifer, turned loose to live upon the sparse sand grass. They were magnified to a preposterous height and looked like mammoths, prehistoric

beasts standing solitary in the waters that for many thousands of years actually washed over the desert: the mirage itself may be the ghost of that long-vanished sea. Beyond the phantom lake lay the line of many-coloured hills; rich, sun-baked yellow, glowing turquoise, lavender, purple; all the open, pastel colours of the desert. . . . On the surface of this fluid sand, one could find bits of brilliant stone, crystals and agates and onyx, and petrified wood as red as blood. Dried toads and lizards were to be found there, too. Birds, decomposing more rapidly, left only feathered skeletons. (59-60)

Thea first recognizes the heroic challenge of nature in her early trip with her father to Wyoming near Laramie, and her meeting with the old frontiersman who was present when the first telegraph message crossed the Missouri to the West with the words: "Westward the course of Empire takes its way" (69). The setting becomes identified with his message, as they follow the wild road to the great flat plain, cut into deep furrows by the wheels of the many wagon-trains and grown over with dry, whitish grass. She looks across these tracks to the distance:

To the west one could see range after range of blue mountains, and at last the snowy range, with its white, windy peaks, the clouds caught here and there on their spurs. Again and again Thea had to hide her face from the cold for a moment. The wind never slept on this plain. . . . The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles. (68-9)

The old man has been a teamster in a freight train between Omaha and Denver, and had observed the heroism of these early pioneers, heading for California in the wagon-trains of the forty-niners. He told of "Indians and buffaloes, thirst and slaughter, wanderings in snow-storms, and lonely graves in the desert" (68). Like Cécile, Thea is impressed with these old stories of American martyrs who have challenged nature and controlled it. On winter evenings, she reads under her warm blankets the records of Greeley's expedition to the Pole, and

relishes the cold: "they lay in their frozen sleeping-bags, each man hoarding the warmth of his own body, and trying to make it last as long as possible against the oncoming cold that would be everlasting" (72). Thus Dr. Archie's story of old Jasper Flight in Part V, although intrusive and unrelated to the narrative of Thea and her career, indicates Cather's continuing absorption with the pioneer who defies the laws of nature.²¹ A tenacious old prospector, crippled with rheumatism and a donkey whose ear has been split by the cold, Flight is determined to return to his beat for he believes God has given the secret of the silver deposits to his burro, and Dr. Archie hopes that he may die in the hills, instead of in a city hospital away from the land he loves (474).

The relationship of Thea to nature is indicated in her friendship with Ray Kennedy, a pioneer of nature related to Tom Outland of The Professor's House and to Pierre Charron of Shadows on the Rock. Ray belongs appropriately out-of-doors, his face reddened by the sun and his eyes pale with "the faded look often seen in the eyes of men who have lived much in the sun and wind and who have been accustomed to train their vision upon distant objects" (137). He is a typical romanticized Westerner of the heart-of-gold school: "observant, truthful and kindly" (63), loyal-hearted with "a high standard of personal honour" and the proper "sentimental veneration for women, good as well as bad" (64), in short, a true romantic. His speech like Tom's is succinct and expressive--"when he talked naturally he was always worth listening to" (63)--and he prefigures Tom in his diary of Panther Canyon. His life too is romanticized, for his experiences

have bred in him a mature philosophy. At sixteen, he was prepared to freeze with his sheep in a Wyoming blizzard (74). He has educated himself, studying his grammar while sheep-herding and reading by the roof-lamp of the caboose Robert Ingersoll's "The Age of Reason" while the gang played poker below (64). His dream like that of the American stereotype is for easy money "a fortune kicked up somewhere in the hills--an oil well, a gold mine, a ledge of copper" (67), and although several times he has been close to fortune, he was always too early or too late, as when he sold his shares in a silver mine just before it struck to bring his brother-in-law's body home for burial from Cuba (64-6). Yet he dies happy with the intuition that in Thea he has "backed a winner once in his life!" (188).

The treatment of Ray Kennedy is distanced and sentimentalized. His actions and his personality, like those of Tom Outland, are presented through description and summarized narrative. But while this is appropriate in Tom's case, since he exists largely in the memory of the Professor, in The Song of the Lark the use of ^{an} omniscient narrator precludes this type of treatment. Yet he is important, not only because he provides a means of escape for Thea from the narrow world of Moonstone, but because he represents the nature which she absorbs into her own being and then rejects. His heroic death, sentimentalized though it is, marks Thea's transition; he gives her with his insurance "the rugged strength of his body to help her through with it all" (188), telling her nothing of his dreams to marry her but bidding her goodbye "with the exultation born of bodily pain" (188). Even at the scene of Ray's fatal accident, Thea finds it hard to

concentrate upon Ray, and her mind is concerned with many other things; "The grasshoppers, the lizards distracted her attention and seemed more real to her than poor Ray" (182). Her lack of concern is more than the effect of shock. It is characteristic of Thea that she sacrifices people to her dreams. Ray represents the nature which she is moving away from, towards art. His value lies in his very inability to understand her yearnings and desire:

His glance was never so intimate or so penetrating as Doctor Archie's. His blue eyes were clear and shallow, friendly, unenquiring. He rested Thea because. . . he never set lively fancies going in her head; because he never misunderstood her, and because he never, by any chance, for a single instant, understood her! Yes, with Ray she was safe; by him she would never be discovered! (138)

The Ancient People too are men of nature and they become a source of strength and inspiration to Thea; more fully than Ray they give her their strength in art. They teach Thea "the inevitable hardness of human life" (554), and challenge her as they challenged Cather herself in her visit to Arizona: "the rock walls challenged one to climb and one might end by hanging on by one's fingertips, measuring oneself with that ancient image Death, which so easily overpowered a white man in this environment".²² Thea's first response to Panther Canyon is passivity. It represents a refuge from Chicago, and a return to the elemental powers of nature; "She was getting back to the earliest sources of gladness that she could remember" (369). Her tired personality seems to be absorbed into the masculinity of the setting: "The high, sparkling air drank it up like blotting paper. It was lost in the thrilling blue of the new sky and the song of the thin wind in the pinons" (368):

Her power to think seemed converted into a power of sustained sensation. She could become a mere receptacle for heat, or become a colour, like the bright lizards that darted about on the hot stones outside her door; or she could become a continuous repetition of sound, like the cicadas. (373)

At this point her art too becomes a sensation, rather than a struggle, and is connected with her "ideas", associated with "fragrance, colour and sound, but almost nothing to do with words" (373). But Panther Canyon acts too as a precipitant for Thea's memories of the past, and her creative being, drawing upon the source of nature in her past, blossoms forth like the moonflowers in Mrs. Tellamantez' garden:

There were memories of light on the sandhills, of masses of prickly pear blossoms she had found in the desert in early childhood, of the late afternoon sun pouring through the grape leaves and the mint bed in Mrs. Kohler's garden, which she would never lose. These recollections were a part of her mind and personality. . . .

Here in the sunlit cave, she feels how easy it would be to succumb to the power of nature: "how easy it would be to dream one's life out in some cleft of the world" (374-5).

But gradually she becomes more active. Even the great pines of the Navajo forest preach the doctrine of heroic struggle and individual search; they strive alone, isolated from each other: "Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. . . . Each tree has its exalted power to bear" (367). Through physical contact with the canyon are transmitted the emotions of the original cliff-dwellers, basic human feelings of fear or desire, of "warmth and cold and water and physical strength", the sullenness of the women, the fears of the aged, the weight of a heavy Indian baby slung on her back (376). As she observes the canyon, in the early morning, the air heavy, the

stream in the gorge threatening, she considers the alien quality of nature which resists mankind, and against which man has had to struggle for his very life and art:

The sullenness of the place seemed to say that the world could get on very well without people, red or white; that under the human world there was a geological world, conducting its silent, immense operations which were indifferent to man. . . . What courage the early races must have had to endure so much for the little they got out of life. (388-9)

Yet unlike Tom, she does not consider the Pueblo races ideal. They are like the swallows who do not dare to rise above the rock walls (374); they live their lives out here in the shelter of the canyon, "a timid, nest-building folk" (375). And she turns away from the passivity of the Canyon, the way of dream and nostalgia for a lost past, and towards the world of Art: "tired of the desert and the dead races, of a world without change or ideas" (408). Yet her artistic power has bloomed here in this canyon with her intuitive understanding of the meaning of art and life, and she later tells Fred:

I don't know if I'd ever have got anywhere without Panther Canyon. . . . They taught me the inevitable hardness of human life. No artist gets far who doesn't know that. And you can't know it with your mind. You have to realize it in your body; deep. It's an animal sort of feeling. (554)

Thus Thea rejects nature as a refuge from society, a sanctuary from life and even art, to which Mrs. Kohler retreats:

[Mrs. Kohler] lived for her men and her garden. Beside that sand gulch she had tried to reproduce a bit of her own village in the Rhine valley. She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned. In the blaze of the open plain she was stupid and blind like an owl. Shade; shade; that was what she was always planning and making. Behind the high tamarisk hedge, her garden was a jungle of verdure in summer. (28)

Wunsch too retreats to Nature as a refuge; his last wish is to "end his days with her, and to be buried in the garden, under her linden trees." But Thea, although she loves the desert, has always known she would reject nature for art, since that summer morning when she discovers the reality of her voice through the song of Wunsch, "Im leuchtenden Sommermorgen":

She did not go home, but wandered off into the sand dunes. . . . She was shaken by a passionate excitement. . . . She wandered for a long while about the sand ridges, picking up crystals and looking into the yellow prickly-pear blossoms with their thousand stamens. She looked at the sandhills until she wished she were a sandhill. And yet she knew that she was going to leave them all behind some day. They would be changing all day long, yellow and purple and lavender, and she would not be there. From that day one, she felt there was a secret between her and Wunsch. (99-100)

Yet at the moment of separation from her old life and the nature which she has loved, Thea realizes that she feels no loss for she carries this life within her, as part of herself rather than merely an external setting: "Everything that was essential seemed to be right there in the car with her. She lacked nothing. She even felt more compact and confident than usual. She was all there, and something else was there too. . . that warm sureness" (199).

Thea's development in Book I extends over a series of years, and is not related closely to the pattern of the seasons as is that of Jim Burden or of Alexandra Bergson. Lacking this, the choice of incident seems uncertain, and the relation of each to the life and art of Thea is not always clear or organic. This is partially a flaw in structure, for Cather is employing the "full-bodied" method of fiction and is following the train of thought of her own youth without imposing upon these situations and thoughts an emotional

order of association or a logical order of cause-and-effect. It is perhaps partially the result of an attempt to handle several years of maturing, although she does this successfully in My Ántonia and O Pioneers!, perhaps a product of her basic unfamiliarity with the Southwest so that she uses set descriptions as decoration rather than as part of mood or theme. There are, however, certain suggestions of a seasonal structure which are obscured by the fullness of detail and incident. The novel opens in December with the birth of Thor, the youngest Kronberg, and the rescue of Thea from death by Dr. Archie:

The town looked small and black, flattened down in the snow, muffled and all but extinguished. Overhead the stars shone gloriously. It was impossible not to notice them. The air was so clear that the white sandhills to the east of Moonstone gleamed softly. (6)

This section is narrated from the point-of-view of Dr. Archie, and the detail of his character, his life, his office, and his opinion of Moonstone culture distracts us from the centrality of Thea and her father's greater concern over an infant son than a daughter who is a potential genius, and "worth the whole litter" (10). We next meet Thea in summer, after her recovery from pneumonia, and her rebirth into art is indicated by the emphasis of the passage upon new life in springtime:

It was in summer that one really lived. . . . The town looked as if it had just been washed. People were out painting their fences. The cottonwood trees were a-flicker with sticky, yellow little leaves, and the feathery tamarisks were in pink bud. With the warm weather came freedom for everybody. People were dug up, as it were. The very old people, whom one had not seen all winter, came out and sunned themselves in the yard. The double windows were taken off the houses, the tormenting flannels in which children had been encased all winter were put away. (26-7)

But again the implications of the passage are obscured by other detail.

The dominant mood of Book I is summer: Thea's visit to Spanish Johnny, her visit to the Turquoise Hills and to Denver with Ray, her recognition of her own voice and of her art which will call her away from Moonstone (99-100). Winter is remote. It comes late and is subdued in the year following her visit to the Turquoise Hills; it seems unconnected with the Christmas concert or the lesson "Ah! ich habe sie verloren" (89) and is introduced largely to mark time between Thea's thirteenth birthday and the death of Ray which enables her to study in Chicago. The setting of icy streets, grey clouds, rattling windows, contrasts with the shelter of Thea's attic room and with the exotic life of her imagination as she reads Anna Karenina (163-5). In contrast to the summer of Moonstone and of Panther Canyon, we see Chicago largely in spring, the first spring of Thea's life in the city, which offers no solace to people bound by the confinement of city life:

Spring came; windy, dusty, strident, shrill; a season almost more violent in Chicago than the winter from which it releases one, or the heat to which it eventually delivers one. . . . There was in the air that sudden, treacherous softness which makes the Poles who work in the packing-houses get drunk. At such times, beauty is necessary, and in Packing-town there is no place to get it except at the saloons, where one can buy for a few hours the illusion of comfort, hope, love--whatever one most longs for. (249-50)

The second spring brings Thea's illness, her second symbolic death:

"Thea was as grey as the weather. Her skin looked sick. Her hair, too, though on a damp day it curled charmingly about her face, looked pale" (359). From this she is rescued by Fred, her romantic knight who sends her for the summer to his father's ranch at Panther Canyon, and vows to "attack her when his lance was brighter" (363). Dr.

Archie rescues Thea once more, this time from her involvement with Fred Ottenburg, in January, a time of false spring with its "thin light" and "treacherously soft air" (451), perhaps signifying that Thea has not yet reached the maturity of her art despite her "marriage".

In "Kronberg", the setting is winter; Dr. Archie gives us a detailed description of winter in Denver which has no connection with either the narrative or Thea (471,475) and Thea's only connection with Nature seems to be her fear that a cold may ruin her voice. While the Epilogue returns to summer (as Cather's epilogues usually do) there is no particular reason for this, except perhaps to suggest that Thea has reached the summer of her achievement and has brought to fruition her great gift. Thus any attempt to structure the novel by a seasonal pattern as in My Ántonia or O Pioneers! has been abandoned after the summer of Panther Canyon.

For the artist, a relationship to nature such as Alexandra's is no longer possible. While Jim returns to the land at the end of My Ántonia, he must return to the world of the city. And for the true artist, nature can be only a source of strength, a stimulation for creativity in that other world, the world of art. Thea belongs ultimately in New York; Claude Wheeler dies spiritually, although he has all that Alexandra asks of life, a rich farm and opportunity for expansion. And the Professor, in returning to the lake and the woods as a refuge, abandons his role of artist for a simple life with the basic essentials of animal existence. In The Song of the Lark, Cather really bids goodbye to the land and Nature, to her Nebraska background as a centre for the artist. "You can't go back" says Thea,

and in attempting to go back, My Antonia and "Neighbour Rosicky" are primarily nostalgic.

The Artist Fulfilled: "in der Brust, in der Brust it is, und ohne dieses giebt es keine Kunst" (99)

The only novel to deal at length with the artistic poersonality per se, The Song of the Lark stands apart as well from the short stories, which present only certain facets of this personality and stress rather the interaction of the artist with a hostile society. In Thea, then, we have the fullest portrait of Cather's artist, the portrait which is reflected in part in each of the other stories and novels on art.

The original title, "Artist's Youth," although less effective than The Song of the Lark and inappropriate for the last part, indicates more clearly the central organization of the novel, and its relation to Cather's theme of art as the central order of life (v). For the novel concerns not a passive development of perception, but an active acceptance of the difficult role of the artist, and Thea's struggle for recognition of her goal, the creation of beauty and order in opposition to the shallow "culture" which society now accepts.

The novel is organized around Thea; her development is presented chronologically through her contact with true art in Professor Wunsch, Spanish Johnny, Harsayani and Bowers, each of which develop one side of her personality; through her relationships to the sympatico Dr. Archie, Ray Kennedy, Fred Ottenburg, who guide her and strengthen her resolve; and through her opposition to the world of non-art and

pseudo-art, represented in Moonstone by Lily Fisher, in Chicago by Jessie D'Arcy, Mrs. Priest and the contralto in the Methodist choir, and in New York by the soprano who sings Ortrud. In addition she is influenced by art itself, in the music of the Mexicans in Moonstone; in the paintings and sculpture of the Art Institute, the orchestral works of Dvorák, the operas of Wagner, the German songs of Wunsch, in Chicago; and ⁱⁿ the pottery of the Cliff-dwellers which reveals to her the true meaning of art and her place in this "long chain of human endeavour" (380). While the order of incidents is chronological, Thea's understanding of art and the development of her artistic personality cuts across these chronological incidents as in real life, each stage in her career marking a further increase in perception, and a fuller development of ideas which she partially apprehends even in the cultural desert of Moonstone.

The Song of the Lark formulates, more clearly than any other fictional work of Cather, the real significance of art in human existence, and Thea comes to a recognition of this role in her discovery of the Indian pottery in Panther Canyon. Even in this elementary society, where life is closely tied to the preservation of existence, Cather notes the human need for beauty which divides society into creators and preservers, the women who make the jars to carry the water, by hand and with care, and those who employ the jars to bring this water to their people. Cather's definition of art as "the envelope and sheath of the precious element" (377) thus suggests that of Maurice Beebe: "a work of art is an attempt to capture and imprison subjective time within the form of art"²³:

The stream and the broken pottery: what was art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining elusive element which is life itself--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals. (378)

Thus even in the practical life of a primitive civilization, based on the struggle for food and life itself, the desire for art expresses itself as one of the basic needs of human beings: "Food, fire, water, and something else. . . . Down here at the beginning, that painful thing was already stirring; the seed of sorrow, and of so much delight" (379). But while this need is in all human beings, only the great artist can make use of it to order and shape his perceptions and create the beauty which man craves. And his final art is a combination of several factors, an innate talent, a great desire which will develop this talent at any sacrifice, and a dedication to study and experience in order to develop this talent to its full potential.

In a sense, Thea is the Cather artist, and her characteristics are those which, in Cather's view, determine not only the nature but the quality and intensity of her art. Fremstad's appeal for her is natural considering Cather's primary interests evidenced in her fiction thus far. Sergeant describes her; "she had the rebellious dubious eyes, far-scanning and keen, of the pioneer women on the Divide--and an intelligence that challenged you and put you sharply on your mettle".²⁴ The story of Fremstad's life clearly appealed to her:

Circumstances have never helped Mme. Fremstad. She grew up in a new crude country where there was neither artistic stimulus nor discriminating taste. She was poor, and always had to earn her own living and pay for music lessons out of her own earnings. She fought her own way toward the intellectual centres of the world. She wrung from fortune the one profit which adversity sometimes leaves with strong natures--the power to conquer.²⁵

Thus she illustrates the characteristics which are typical of the Romantic artist: sensitivity, individuality, introversion, even egoism and self-centredness, enthusiasm, passion and a will to live stronger than those around. The Romantic artist is usually misunderstood by society and rejected, and he refuses to entangle himself with this society by marriage or other form of obligation.²⁶

Certain of Thea's characteristics are also derived from the other two women in "Three American Singers", Louise Homer and Geraldine Farrar. She has Homer's "physical poise" on stage, and her physical attributes, "large, handsome, generous" with "reservoirs of strength and calmness to draw from", although it is made clear that this costs her much.²⁷ Her passion and enthusiasm for living is closer to Geraldine Farrar's:

[Farrar] consumes herself as ardently in her recreations as she does in her work; she gives herself out to the costumers who design for her, the artists who paint for her, the stage-hands who adore her. She says that she "would rather live ten years thick than twenty thin". . . . "I want to give it out all in a lump. I want to go hard while I'm at it!"²⁸

Cather conveys this less successfully in The Song of the Lark, largely through secondary characters. Mrs. Kronberg notes in Thea an elasticity of body resulting from "her highly charged desire to live" (282), and Fred Ottenburg comments that Thea will "always break through into the realities" (444), that if she had married and had children,

she would have driven them to death: "You'd have managed in some way to live twenty times as much as the people around you" (444).

This ardour transmits itself to her voice and her characterization and lifts her singing above the average. As Sieglinde she recognizes:

Every movement was the right movement, that her body was absolutely the instrument of her idea. . . . All that deep-rooted vitality flowered in her voice, her face, in her very finger-tips. She felt like a tree bursting into bloom. And her voice was as flexible as her body; equal to any demand, capable of every nuance. (571-2)²⁹

This ardour, this zest for living, results in the individuality of the artist, her nonconformity to society, and this too is a central characteristic. Again it is Fred who expresses this:

Don't you know most of the people in the world are not individuals at all? They never have an individual idea or experience. A lot of girls go to boarding-school together, come out the same season, dance at the same parties, are married off in groups, have their babies at about the same time, send their children to school together, and so the human crop renews itself. . . . They get their most personal experiences out of novels and plays. . . . Why, you couldn't live like that. (443)³⁰

Thea is typical too in her sacrifice of everything to art; as she says to Fred "There's only one thing that's all beautiful--and always beautiful" (558). Nothing exists for the artist but her art. This had been a private belief of Cather's since her university days, but Geraldine Farrar would agree, for Farrar "does not believe that conjugal and maternal duties are easily compatible with artistic development; she does not believe that, for an artist, anything can be very real or very important except art".³¹ This dedication to the beautiful is inborn and must exist in the artist; Harsanyi asks Thea: "What you want more than anything else in the world is to be

an artist; is that true?" (264). Without this dedication, art will never be great; she must sacrifice to "the thing in you that has no business with what is little, that will have to do only with beauty and power" (267). Thea sacrifices her personal life to its creation. As Fred recognizes, she moves toward her destiny with a "drift like a rifle ball" (393). And she demands for her art complete freedom from responsibility. Her drive is based on exultation: "It's waking up every morning with the feeling that your life is your own, and your strength is your own and your talent is your own; that you're all there, and there's no sag in you" (394). In this life, marriage has no place. As Fred says, "She's made to live with ideas and enthusiasms, not with a husband" (510) and later more bitterly, "After the one responsibility you do feel, I doubt if you've enough left to feel responsible to God!" (558).

This concentration, this denial of any other responsibility, generates selfishness and self-centredness.³² Fred realizes that Thea has no power to deal with people, that she deliberately antagonizes them, despising their absurdities and pretensions (423). She claims the servitude of Landry, of Dr. Archie and of Ottenburg; she demands their support but gives nothing in return. She breaks Landry's amber elephant: "His things are so overpetted that I was tempted to be careless" (541). More important, she has demanded the encouragement of Fred for ten years, preventing him from marriage and the son he wants, and when he cannot give her what she needs, she flashes out "I'm not tying you, am I? . . . I thought you sent me out to get something. I didn't know you wanted me to bring in something easy. . . .

Nobody on God's earth wants it, really! If one other person wanted it. . ." (556-7). Nor does she give up any part of her life for her mother. Called home to her mother's deathbed from Germany, she refused to come and give up her first big role. Although she says to Ottenburg "I've only a few friends, but I can lose every one of them, if it has to be. I learned how to lose when my mother died" (559), it is not apparent that the sacrifice has hurt her. And Cather, although she herself acted differently, approves, for she feels that to the true artist all things must be allowed. She accepts with Mrs. Field Aristotle's maxim: "With a great gift. . . we must be willing bear, because it has already greatly borne", and in the true artist she forgives "vanity, sensitiveness, selfishness, indecision, and vacillation of will".³³

In the last part of the novel, much of Thea's character is patterned on Fremstad, whom Brown describes as frequently unperceptive, overbearing, difficult with those who crossed her even in trivialities, merciless with triflers, often withdrawn and cold, and even frequently creating a "rumpus" about nothing.³⁴ She adopts too Fremstad's attitude to life--"We are born alone, we make our way alone, we die alone"; "the artist's quest is pursued alone, and. . . the highest rewards are, for the most part, enjoyed alone"³⁵--and to work: "Work is the only thing that interests her. . . . [Other things] from a distance seem beautiful; but. . . art is the only thing that remains beautiful".³⁶ And her theory of art is similar, and similarly condescending; Harsanyi's remark "Her secret? It is every artist's secret. . . passion. That is all. It is an open secret, and perfectly

safe. Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials" is clearly similar to Fremstad's remark: "If you ever really find anything in art, it is so subtle and so beautiful that--well, you need never be afraid any one will take it away from you, for the chances are nobody will ever know you've got it".³⁷

The Kronberg of the final act is a woman hard, dry, selfish at the core, frequently petty. Cather suggests that "the free creature who retains her youth and beauty and warm imagination "on stage must be retained at the expense of the everyday person "the harrassed, susceptible human creature [who] comes and goes, subject to colds, brokers, dressmakers, managers" (vi). Geismar points out that the scenes of wealth and cultivation at the end of the novel provide "a curious resolution to the tale of an immigrant girl from Colorado" and asks of all "these material conveniences, the trappings of luxury", the fur coat, the waiting taxis, the intimate dinners, the lingerie--"Is all this^a sort of compensation for the travail of an artist in a society of so many material conveniences?"³⁸ And Sergeant comments that with this ending at the Metropolitan Opera House "the novel became urban, middle-aged and fortyish, like the author" (104).³⁹ We might well ask if the true artist must exchange his essential humanity for his art.

The great artist has need of three things; innate talent, will or desire, and discipline or training. Thea's first teacher Wunsch formulates for Thea the theory that the secret of art is inborn; the artist carries it with him throughout his early development, hugging it to himself and sharing it with no one but other artists:

If you do not know in the beginning, you do not know in the end. For a singer there must be something in the inside from the beginning. Oh, much you can learn! . . . But the secret--what makes the rose to red, the sky to blue, the man to love--in der Brust, in der Brust, it is und ohne dieses giebt es keine Kunst. (98-9)

Thea's talent, her voice is inborn, as Wunsch observes when she first sings "Im leuchtenden Sommermorgen", a soft, rich contralto whose feeling exists apart from emphasis or pitch: "It was a nature-voice. . . breathed from the creature and apart from language, like the sound of the wind in the trees, or the murmur of water" (97). Harsanyi compares its natural, relaxed throb to the passionate beating wings of a wild bird, the breath rising from the bottom of her self, the voice relaxed laying on the breath (237), and the Kohlers, hearing Thea's soprano above the Mexican chorus and tenor, find it "like a fountain jet, . . . like a goldfish darting among creek minnows, like a yellow butterfly soaring above a swarm of dark ones" (296). Finally Dr. Archie describes the voice of Thea as Elsa von Brabant as "a river of silver sound" (500).

Thus Thea's voice is basically natural, closely aligned to the physical body from which it is released, as she comes to realize in Panther Canyon: "Voice was, first of all, vitality; a lightness in the body and a driving power in the blood. . . . When she felt so keenly alive. . . when her body bounded like a rubber ball away from its hardness, then she could sing" (381).³⁹ It is Fred Ottenburg who explains in a didactic passage this inborn quality of colour which is a product of the self behind the voice, pure, warm, and human:

There's the voice itself, so beautiful and individual, and then

there's something else; the thing in it which responds to every shade of thought and feeling, spontaneously, almost unconsciously. That colour has to be born in a singer, it can't be acquired. . . . It's almost like another gift--the rarest of all. The voice simply is the mind and is the heart. It can't go wrong in interpretation, because it has in it the thing that makes all interpretation. (509)⁴⁰

Thea has been aware of this gift from an early age. Harsayani, who has taught her piano for many months with only moderate success, attacks her: "You know that you can sing, do you not? You have always known it. While we worked here together, you sometimes said to yourself, 'I have something you know nothing about; I could surprise you'" (265), and Thea admits "There was always--something" (264). This secret she has shared with Wunsch (100) but with no one else, for the world of non-art would never understand.⁴¹

Yet the artist must struggle to shape and control this creative power in order to transmit it to those who are not artists. He must devote his life entirely to translating his idea into his materials, paint or clay, words or music, and the world outside exists for him only in terms of his art: "Nothing is far and nothing is near, if one desires. There is only one big thing--desire" (95). Art is a human product which must be expressed through the physical body of the artist; it depends for its existence upon this physical frame, yet it arises from within and is only stimulated by the outer environment:

Life rushed in upon her through that window--or so it seemed. In reality, of course, life rushes from within, not from without. There is no work of art so big or so beautiful that it was not once all contained in some youthful body, like this one which lay on the floor in the moonlight, pulsing with ardour and anticipation. (177)

The talent, and the desire--these things must be born in the artist, and are evident already in his early childhood. Thea tells Dr. Archie that she was more fully an artist in Moonstone than she has been since: "I am more or less of an artist now, but then I was nothing else. When I went with you to Chicago that first time, I carried with me the essentials of all I shall ever do" (551-2).

In the second phase of her life, her study under Harsanyi in Chicago, Thea comes to realize that the road of art requires much more than talent and desire, that it requires much hard work, discipline and many experiences of seeming failure. While the physical body is conceived by the mother, the artist must himself develop his own art, through a labour longer and harder than that of natural birth: "Every artist makes himself born. . . . Your mother did not bring anything into the world to play the piano. That you must bring into the world yourself" (221). Thea devotes her life now to the study of language and technique, yet she is not yet strong enough to dedicate herself to the life of the artist, and her second spring in Chicago brings illness, both physical and mental.

It is her contact with the art of the past in Panther Canyon which fuses these two, desire and labour, into art. Here where the timid swallows hover about between the walls of the canyon, unable to transcend their environment, the eagle rises above the gulf into the arching blue sky, steeped in the golden light of the sun, a symbol of the artist: "O eagle of eagles! Endeavour, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art!" (399).⁴² The Ancient People have been timid like the swallows. They are a vanished race whose physical

life has long since ceased, yet their art remains in the form of their frail clay pottery, "fragments of their desire" (399), an impression in permanent form of the imperfect striving of human life toward the ideal and the beautiful, like Keats' Grecian Urn. The inspiration of their desire delivers Thea alike from contempt and lassitude, and she turns away from nature and her past, from the demands of human and social life and its petty struggles, to the dedication of art. Here the artist is born.

Thea comes to her artistic inheritance through her contact with three groups of people, the true artists who guide her towards her goal and provide inspiration for her, the artistic sympathizers, who support her morally and financially, and the large group of non-artists who go to make up society, either as pseudo-artists or as the culturally deprived. Each major stage of her development brings her into contact with each of these groups, in Moonstone, Chicago, Panther Canyon, and New York.

Thea first comes to a realization of her artistic potentialities in Moonstone through her exposure to A. Wunsch whose artistic direction is opposite to Thea's own.⁴³ While she moves out of the West, first to Chicago and then to Europe and the World, it is Wunsch's fate to move from a career in Europe, to New York, to St. Louis and Kansas City where the shallowness of American culture maddens him, and finally to Moonstone and "a death in the desert"(123). Plagued by ill fortune and victimized by sharpers, driven out of town after town for his drinking and hounded for his judgement of local talent, he still hopes for Thea and desires for her what he can never have for himself (37).

Dr. Archie comments that there is as yet no place in America, and especially in the west, for the accomplished artist:

He's got nothing to sell that a mining town wants to buy. Why don't those old fellows stay at home? We won't need them for another hundred years. An engine-wiper can get a job, but a piano-player! Such people can't make good. (105)

Yet it is Wunsch, brought to Moonstone by chance or fate to release the talent in Thea, who advises her that her art is inborn.

Spanish Johnny and the Mexicans too contribute to her perception of art. Johnny's conch-shell becomes a symbol of the desire of art which calls one from everyday life to follow its lure, to leave home in search of it: "To him, it is the sea itself. A little thing is big to him" (57). Indeed all the Mexicans are artists, natural and uncultivated like the Pueblo Cliff-dwellers. Johnny plays the mandolin skilfully and sings in "a high uncertain tenor" with many faults but a real happiness in singing (54, 293-4). The musicians at the dance in Mexican town alternately play and join the dancing, and all are accomplished in both. They have too the artist's absorption in art and recognize the power in Thea's voice:

She had never before sung for a really musical people, and this was the first time she had ever felt the response that such a people can give. They turned themselves and all they had over to her. For the moment they cared about nothing in the world but what she was doing. (292)

Spanish Johnny and the Mexicans, then, through their relish for living, their enthusiasm for true art, their joy in their craft, influence Thea's decision to become the dedicated singer.⁴⁴ In the final section, Spanish Johnny emerges from Thea's concert smiling with a smile that "embraced all the stream of life that passed him" (573). It is for

such as he that the artist exists and suffers to create beauty through art; Spanish Johnny is the answer to Thea's doubts of "the good of it all" (573).⁴⁵

Thea's first contact with the artist fulfilled is with Andor Harsayani who will become a brilliant pianist but is at the moment teaching piano students for a living. It is Harsayani who comes to realize Thea's potentialities as an artist, not a pianist but a singer. When Thea cries out "It was you who made me want to play piano," he replies "Can't you see, my dear girl, that was only because I happened to be the first artist you have ever known? If I had been a trombone player. . . you would have wanted to play trombone" (264-5).

Yet despite his central role in the novel, we see little of the artist in Harsayani, perhaps because this might detract from Thea's position; he never plays for us nor is his playing described. He is described physically in detail: his body is slender and active, the shoulders sloping gracefully, and his head is finely moulded; his hands are sure and flexible, and his feet well-shaped (230, 234). His one good eye reveals his whole personality: "His eye was wonderful; full of light and fire when he was interested, soft and thoughtful when he was tired or melancholy" (230). Harsayani is the true Catherian artist in his desire for order, stability and the good life. His wife manages their finances, for debts cripple his art "like bars on the window"; she provides this stability: "Quiet and order and his wife's good taste were the things that meant most to him. After these, good food, good

cigars, a little good wine" (233). He is a connoisseur of domestic art too; Thea is impressed by the ritual of dining at the Harsayani's, the table laid with silver candlesticks, flowers, excellent wine. There is suspense while the master tastes the soup: "He had a theory that if the soup went well, the dinner would go well; but if the soup was poor, all was lost" (229).

To Thea, Harsayani opens the world of art, and he gives her the strength to become the artist, although he cannot give her the training to become a singer. He gives her all he has: "All I really know about that girl is she tires me to death. We must not have her often. If I did not have my living to make, then--" (238). Yet she stimulates him as well, one artist recreating the powers of another. After she leaves, his brain is effervescent, his mind full of musical ideas, or fancies. While she tires him, she never bores him like his many dull pupils, and her sympathetic appreciation of true music stirs him towards his own fulfilment (239-40). While Wunsch and Spanish Johnny have revealed to her her own power, and have stimulated her desire to seek its fulfilment, Harsayani gives her the discipline and the inspiration. He teaches her that the artist must create himself, must bring his own art to birth through struggle and suffering. In this struggle he must sacrifice everything, including fame, for only the best art is true to the ideal of beauty and power from which it springs. Compromise is failure (266).

Her second teacher in Chicago, Madison Bowers, influences Thea negatively, in contrast to Harsayani, for he has become bitter and has allowed his art to be compromised by mediocrity. He is "cold,

bitter, avaricious" with "the soul of a shrimp", yet he is knowledgeable, conscientious and industrious (271). He is a top man in his field, in the techniques of singing, but he can "no more make an artist than a throat specialist could" (271) as Harsayani says.⁴⁶ Bowers is not the true artist for Cather. He is shallow, discontented, contemptuous of the audience and patronizing to the performers, reading a review or newspaper throughout most concerts: "He went to concerts chiefly to satisfy himself as to how badly things were done and how gullible the public was" (314). He is intelligent, full of taste, but cold and academic, and inherits from his New Hampshire farming ancestry both his shrewdness and his meanness. He hates the artist for he has not the discipline, the renunciation, or the idealism to become one himself: "He hated the whole race of artists; the work they did, the wages they got, and the way they spent their money" (314). As a result, the more money he makes from the crude new desire for culture, the more he despises his artists, his audiences and himself.

He advises Thea to compromise for the sake of wealth and pleasure, to deny her real talent:

When you come to marketing your wares in the world, a little smoothness goes farther than a great deal of talent sometimes. If you happen to be cursed with a real talent, then you've got to be very smooth, indeed, or you'll never get your money back. (317-18)

With Bowers Thea despises the society of socialites and rich "artists" for their lack of ability and training, and she learns from him not only the techniques of her voice training but also the ease with which she could prostitute her art and her ideals for an easy success. And her determination to overcome Bowers and his "stupid" artists leads

to her later decision to seek the best training available for her voice, not in America but in Germany.

In Book III "Panther Canyon," Thea is exposed to the origins of art, and to the first race of artists in America. They create, not from the necessities for physical survival, but from an inborn desire for something beyond the physical struggle for life, something permanent in the midst of flux. Their pottery, "fragments of their desire" (399), binds Thea like fetters to the long line of artists who form a "chain of human endeavour" (380). Their creative ability is revealed not only in the designs in red, brown, black or white on their water vessels, but also in their architecture, their houses "cut out of the face of the living rock" (145), their woven blankets, their fox-fur cloaks, even their strings of turquoises, the stones rubbed smooth and soft blue, strung together through a small hole drilled in the stone by Indian teeth (148). Thea's appreciation for the Cliff-dweller society and its influence on her dedication to art is already suggested by Ray Kennedy, long before she has been farther than Denver:

When you sit in the sun and let your heels hang out of a doorway that drops a thousand feet, ideas come to you. You begin to feel what the human race has been up against from the beginning. . . . You feel like it's up to you to do your best. . . . You feel like you owed them something. (149)

And Thea later tells Fred that it has been Panther Canyon which has inspired her ideas and her conception of art:

I don't know if I'd ever have got anywhere without Panther Canyon. . . . They taught me the inevitable hardness of human life. No artist gets far who doesn't know that. And you can't know that with your mind. You have to realize it in your body; deep. It's

an animal sort of feeling. I sometimes think it's the strongest of all. (554)⁴⁷

Thea's struggle to achieve the ideals of the artist is aided by those characters in the novel who appreciate art but who do not themselves create, those who are sympatico.⁴⁸ These characters are important to Thea's development, yet the detail with which they are developed detracts attention from Thea's own life and confuses the structure and mood of the novel. Their function is to provide comfort, aid and financial support for Thea, and an auxiliary function seems to be the provision of a running commentary on Thea's talents in order to convince the readers that she is indeed the artist. In the final section "Kronberg", the problem is not that Thea's career is no longer interesting since she is now mature, but that her ability is constantly expounded by Dr. Archie and Fred Ottenburg and never demonstrated. We sympathize with Dr. Archie who finds this Thea "a beautiful woman from far away, from another sort of life and feeling and understanding than his own, who had in her face something he had known long ago, much brightened and beautified" (500).⁴⁹ Although it is Thea's mother who recognizes her abilities, persuades her father to allow her to teach and later to study in Chicago, who teaches her discipline and training, the central figure of Thea's life in Moonstone is really Dr. Archie, who first saves Thea from death by pneumonia, and later, from depression in New York after the end of her "marriage" with Fred. When we first meet him, Dr. Archie wishes to reject the culture of Moonstone and even his profession; he laments that he has not gone to Denver to hear Fay Templeton sing and allowed Mrs. Kronberg to

capably bear her baby according to nature (6). His everyday life is frustrated, we learn later, by an unfortunate marriage, and Thea to him is the one thing of pleasure in an unhappy life (12-13). He recognizes the latent power in Thea, considering her "worth the whole litter" (10), and he believes the shape of her head indicates that it has "more inside it than most youngsters" (103). A romantic who venerates women and an idealist who believes that the human body contains finer things than anatomy can analyze, he is "easy, gentle, competent, master of himself and other people" (109-10), and thus represents for Cather the idealized character who comes to the support of the artist. For Dr. Archie is never real, except for perhaps the moment when he recognizes that Thea is no longer part of his real world. He is introduced for a purpose, and like Pierre Charron of Shadows on the Rock with whom his supposedly wild past corresponds, he functions only as a backdrop to the heroine.⁵⁰

His home in Denver indicates the real centre of his interests. He has given up his practice and become a business man, an investor in mines and new industries in Colorado and New Mexico, and a political influential. The "comely life" is evident in Cather's description of his new home in Denver. His library is a long double-room full of books, with a big writing desk, heavy curtains and upholstery, and the walls decorated by wild game and engravings. Three Japanese servants arrange chairs before the lighted fire of pine-logs, serve hot coffee and cigarettes, and prepare an excellent dinner which Fred appreciates (480). Like Cather herself he is nostalgic. Although he matures after thirty, yet he looks back to the freshness and vigour

of his life in Moonstone which had been such a burden to him at the time:

His college years he would live again, gladly. . . [and then his years with] Thea Kronberg. There had been something stirring about those years in Moonstone, when he was a restless young man on the verge of breaking into larger enterprises, and when she was a restless child on the verge of growing up into something unknown. He realized now that she had counted for a great deal more to him than he knew at the time. . . . Wherever his life had touched Thea Kronberg's, there was still a little warmth left, a little sparkle. . . . Their walks and drives and confidences, the night they watched the rabbit in the moonlight. . . they were distinctly different from the other memories of his life. . . . They corresponded to what he had hoped to find in the world, and had not found. (487-8)

Fred Ottenburg is introduced on much the same terms as Dr. Archie, as an escape for Thea from her environment and the chance to realize her artistic potentialities. As a character he too is stiff and unreal, and Cather describes his abilities rather than revealing them: his special understanding of others, his personal talent which influences the lives of others: "he had a way of floating people out of dull or awkward situations, out of their own torpor or constraint, or discouragement" (336). His marriage has been a disaster like Dr. Archie's, and these two agree that marriage is a bad state of affairs; Dr. Archie comments: "The whole question of a young man's marrying has looked pretty grave to me for a long time. How have they the courage to keep on doing it? . . . Seems to me all the married people I knew when I was a boy were happy enough" (484). Fred's opinion of the relationship of men and women is even more extreme; marriage relationships lie "between windowless stone walls. . . at the expense of light and air" and their regularity excuses "every sort of human cruelty and meanness, and every kind of humiliation and suffering" (424).⁵¹

Fred too loves the comely life like Dr. Archie. He is full of physical energy and expresses it through music: "Fred had never been bored for a whole day in his life. . . . He had a healthy love of sport and art, of eating and drinking. When he was in Germany, he scarcely knew where the soup ended and the symphony began" (354).

Thea equates Fred with those who have influenced her life previously, her teachers: Wunsch, Dr. Archie, Harsayani, even Ray Kennedy. But she rejects him in the role of teacher and wants him for a sweetheart (358), and the results are the "marriage", which occupies several months of her life, and her resolution^{to} put her energy into study in Germany when she discovers that she is not legally married. Yet Fred is like these others, for he exists to support Thea. He provides her vacation in Panther Canyon, in a nearby ranch of his father's, and he waits for her in New York until his wife dies in a sanatorium and he is free to marry her.⁵² As well, he stimulates her by his humour, his vigour, his constant "rhythm of feeling and action" (392) and the positive force of his personality in a "world of negative people" (392). He too recognizes Thea's talent and sacrifices for it: "She hasn't touched her real force yet. She isn't even aware of it. . . . She'll be one of the great artists of our time" (413). In a sense he creates Kronberg more truly than any one except Harsayani.

But there is a third group which is related to Thea's ultimate success, the pseudo-artists and the non-art materialists which go to make up society, and for whom Thea feels a "creative hate":

If you love the good thing vitally, enough to give up for it all that one must give up, then you must hate the cheap thing just as hard. . . . A contempt that drives you through fire, makes you risk everything and lose everything, makes you a long sight better than you ever knew you could be. (550)

It is this creative hatred which leads Thea to reject the little world of Moonstone and its shallow values, as well as the larger world of Chicago with its provincial and shallow standards of art, and even the shoddy art of New York.

The culture of Moonstone comes to symbolize this cultural sterility of America, this failure to understand the true nature of art and the artist. Moonstone's opinion of art is indicated by Aunt Tillie's speech to Thea's brother when he does not learn his recitation for Washington Day at school: "What are you going to do when you git big and want to git into society, if you can't do nothing? Everybody'll say, 'Can you sing? Can you play? Can you speak? Then git right out of society'" (25). While Mrs. Kronberg recognizes that "talent" in Thea means that she must practise four hours a day, the common idea of talent is that "a child must have her hair curled every day and must play in public" (30). The cultural event of the Moonstone year is the Christmas concert given by the Sunday schools. Here Tillie recites "The Polish Boy", the orchestra plays "Selections from Erminie", the Ladies' Quartet sings "Beloved, it is night", and the Baptist preacher's wife's cousin sings "Thy Sentinel I am". But the star of the program is Lily Fisher, the town's cultural ideal with her golden curls and her pink silk dress trimmed with swansdown. While Thea has been persuaded to play rather than to sing, performing Reinecke's "Ballade" while the restless audience fidgets and whispers,

Lily combines a recitation with song: followed by an encore of "She Sang the Song of Home, Sweet Home". Although the incident emphasizes the childish jealousy of Thea, uncorrected by the adult perspective of the omniscient narrator, Thea does here determine that her future art will depend upon quality rather than popular appeal: "Lily Fisher was pretty, and she was willing to be just as big a fool as people wanted her to be. Very well; Thea Kronberg wasn't. She would rather be hated than be stupid, any day" (81). In her dream that night, even Johnny Tellemantez' shell, the symbol of beauty and man's longing for art, becomes cheapened, calling the name of Lily Fisher through the distant roaring of the sea (81).

Thea's rejection of this society is indicated by the title of Part III "Stupid Faces". In Moonstone even her family opposes her; Thea comes to recognize that her brothers and sisters are alien to the world of art, not "of her kind" but "among the people whom she had always recognized as her natural enemies. . . . Nothing that she would ever do in the world would seem important to them, and nothing they would ever do would seem important to her" (301-2). Other natural enemies are Lily Fisher, Mrs. Livery Johnson who dislikes Thea's association with "Mexicans and sinners", the principal of the school who avoids work among adults and sets his pupils to making tree-diagrams of Hamlet's soliloquy, and all those people of Moonstone who did not approve of Thea's studying in Chicago (193).

But Chicago turns out to be only a bigger Moonstone, and its artistic pretensions are more serious because closer to the potentialities of real art (328). The cultural activities of Chicago are exposed

even more mercilessly than those of Moonstone:

Those were the days when lumbermen's daughters and brewers' wives contended in song; studied in Germany and then floated from Sängerfest to Sängerfest. Choral societies flourished in all the rich lake cities and river cities. The soloists came to Chicago to coach with Bowers. (316)⁵³

Through her work as Madison Bowers' accompanist, Thea comes into contact with these artistic pretensions, and reflects Bowers' contempt for the culture upon which he makes his fortune, his attitude to his "bag of tricks for stupid people, 'life-preservers', he called them. Cheap repairs for a cheap 'un'" (315).

Mrs. Priest represents this type of artist, her face heavy and pink, like a fading peony, her costume expensive and elaborate: "She shone with care and cleanliness, mature vigour, unchallenged authority, gracious good-humour, and absolute confidence in her person, her powers, her position, and her way of life" (319). Her relation to America is made clear through the comment that her "glowing, overwhelming self-satisfaction" is possible only in a young society without a past (319). Thea is contemptuous of her dullness, her pretensions, and feels that she should be punished, "not permitted to live and shine in happy ignorance of what a poor thing it was she brought forth so radiantly" (320). Thea's antipathy to her and to Miles Murdstone brings out in her a hatred and bitterness; "what I learn is just to dislike. I dislike so much and so hard that it tires me out" (323). Jessie Darcey, the new soprano whom the people are demanding, is cheap like Lily Fisher, yet again Thea cannot compete: "People want Jessie Darcey and the kind of thing she does; so what's the use?" (324). Jessie has a thin awkward figure, a sallow face,

many mannerisms and a nervous complacency which made her commonplace. While Katharine Priest is inaccurate and domineering, she has potential, but "people seemed to like Jessie Darcey exactly because she could not sing" (328). Thea suffers for her ideals, the standards which she has unconsciously set for herself, and she turns on Bowers when he suggests that Darcey's off-pitch notes do not affect Thea: "I hate her for the sake of what I used to think a singer might be" (331).

Chicago itself tries to destroy the artist. When Thea first hears Dvorák's New World Symphony, which reminds her of the heroism of the West, and ^{of} ^{the} ^{new} ^{soul} ⁱⁿ ^a ^{new} ^{world} "a new soul in a new world" (251)⁵⁴, her dreams of this heroic world and of the gods in Valhalla are almost erased by the physical opposition of society to heroism and to art. After the concert, while she is waiting for the bus, the people become cold and angry, the sun sets in a red sky and a gale blows off Lake Michigan:

For almost the first time Thea was conscious of the city itself, of the congestion of life all about her, of the brutality and power of those streams that flowed in the streets, threatening to drive one under. People jostled her, ran into her, poked her aside with their elbows, uttering angry exclamations. (252-3)

The world seems determined to destroy the effect of this beauty, created out of a combination of nature and art: "the world became one's enemy; people, buildings, wagons, cars, rushed at one to crush it under, to make one let go of it (254). She is assaulted by this society sexually in the form of a young man looking for a friend for the night, and an old beggar who vanishes like the Devil in a play when she turns on him: "There was some power abroad in the world bent upon

taking from her that feeling with which she had come out of the concert hall" (254). And she sets herself against this enemy, this evil force which attempts to destroy the beautiful, and asserts that she will meet these forces, lined against her to take something from her: "They might trample her to death, but they should never have it. As long as she lived, that ecstasy was going to be hers. She would live for it, work for it, die for it" (254).⁵⁵ And although Thea turns to the lake and the stars for consolation, in a mood which she feels is despair, she is actually challenging this society of complacency and opposition to the true standards of art:

The rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink, is a spent thing; its chief concern is its digestion and its little game of hide-and-seek with the undertaker. Money and office and success are the consolations of impotence. . . . [It is] that stream of hungry boys and girls who tramp the streets every night, recognizable by their pride and discontent, who are the Future, and who possess the treasure of creative power. (333)

In New York, Thea comes to realize the driving power of this creative hate which has led her to reject the shallow cultural standards of Moonstone and Chicago and the shoddy professionalism of the artists who live for public favour. The life of the artist reflects these jealousies and disappointments. The people choose the common and understandable in preference to the excellent: in Moonstone, Lily Fisher, in Chicago, Jessie Darcey. In New York the soprano who sings Ortrud, is "as stupid as an owl and as coarse as a pig" (550), yet the audiences equate her atrocious performance with those of the great artist Necker: "We stand for things that are irreconcilable, absolutely. You can't try to do things right and not despise the people who do them wrong" (550-1). Even these great artists are

involved in petty disputes. Necker, the soprano whose voice is breaking early through illness or bad technique, is "sore" at the world and revenges herself on Thea when Thea's performance of Sieglinde is recognized by the management. Thea is disappointed, for Necker has previously given her support and encouragement; they had always, she thought, "stood for the same sort of endeavour", shared the same ideals. Yet as Fred has pointed out, any artist who does share these ideals cannot be a friend but Thea's deadliest rival (557). Each artist must compete with every other artist for a place in the sun of public recognition, which is capricious and variable and based on many other qualities than artistic ones. Thus New York too is another Moonstone, its standards no more ideal than the standards of Mrs. Livery Johnson and Anna Kronberg.

Thus Thea's ideals are shaped by negatives as well as positives, by hatred for the cheap and common and easy as well as admiration for the good and beautiful. And both of these combine to make Kronberg, the artist.

In the final section of the novel, "Kronberg", all the positive influences are brought together as Thea triumphs over society and non-art. Dr. Archie and Fred Ottenburg become better acquainted and expand on Thea's various excellencies. Spanish Johnny is in the audience the night she sings Sieglinde, "withered and bright as a string of peppers" (572), and even Harsayani who does not go often to the opera "because the stupid things that singers did vexed him" (566). The head of a musical publishing-house, a journalist and the president of a German singing society, join him in his box and also

Fred and Dr. Archie after the second act. Thus all the characters of the novel are tied into the ending, and Cather finds an opportunity to discuss Thea's success and to evade the problem of recreating her as a living entity as she has done in the earlier sections of the novel. The distancing effect destroys the Thea we know and puts another in her place, and the effect is the structural failure of the novel and its breaking into its two components, the life of Willa Cather and the life of Olive Fremstad.⁵⁶

The choice of Olive Fremstad as the Catherian artist par excellence, as Giannone observes⁵⁷, is not accidental; Giannone suggests that the essential inspiration for the novel was "the use of a singer's creative growth as an ideal analogy for the discovery and expression of all art", and Thea Kronberg is the heir of a double legacy, "the combined passion of the folk artist and the educated intelligence of the professional".⁵⁸ Yet Cather's reasons for choosing just such a heroine at just such a time seem to be deeper than her simple interest in music as the "speech of the soul".⁵⁹ Brown suggests that these reasons are more deeply personal, for Fremstad represented the artist that Cather was to become:

The qualities that Willa Cather found in Fremstad are qualities one might hope to find in a great artist who came from the frontier; in her singing were the force and originality of the pioneers, translated into the terms of disciplined art. In Fremstad she saw realized what she was soon to realize in her own art. In The Song of the Lark it was not difficult for her to combine what she felt about Fremstad with what she felt about herself: in Thea Kronberg both are projected.⁶⁰

The Song of the Lark then is Cather's "Portrait of the Artist" with a happy ending, for it deals essentially with Cather's own quest for

self in art. Yet there is an admission in the Preface of 1932 that these days of her early writing, before her discovery of her real self, were the happiest ones of her life; as she says of Thea; "Success is never so interesting as struggle--not even to the successful" (v).

The Artist and Religion: "to live those twenty splendid years" (175)

In The Song of the Lark, Cather's attitude to formal religion is almost totally negative, an attack on the smugness and complacency of the church and its misdirection in its mission. For Thea, unlike Professor St. Peter, finds the meaning of life in the order of art, and it is not until Cather recognizes the emptiness of art that she turns to religion in search of a deeper and less temporal truth. This negative view of religion is partially anticipated in O Pioneers! and My Ántonia, its narrowness and its stultifying effect on local culture, but these other novels also include a broader view of religion in the Catholicism of Marie Shabata and Amédée, and the tolerant Protestantism of Grandfather Burden. In The Song of the Lark, the church does not embrace the world of art but stands as its antithesis, the world which ~~rejects~~ true art for pseudo-culture, true dedication for pettiness, worldliness and fanaticism. In consequence, the order of religion ceases to exist as an entity with Book III "Stupid Faces", and Thea's religion from this point on becomes the religion of art.

The attitude of the novel is summed up effectively by Dr. Archie in Part I. Thea is concerned over the tramp who has been rejected alike by church and society, and asks if the Bible is true.

If the next life is all that matters, and we're put here to get ready for it, then why do we try to make money, or learn things, or have a good time? There's not one person in Moonstone that really lives the way the New Testament says. Does it matter or doesn't it?

Dr. Archie's reply is significant:

Every people has had its religion. All religions are good, and all are pretty much alike. But I don't see how we could live up to them in the sense you mean. I've thought about it a good deal, and I can't help feeling that while we are in this world we have to live for the best things of this world, and those things are material and positive. Now, most religions are passive, and they tell us chiefly what we should not do. . . . See here, my girl, take out the years of early childhood and the time we spend in sleep and dull old age, and we only have about twenty able, waking years. That's not long enough to get acquainted with half the fine things that have been done in the world, much less to do anything ourselves. I think we ought to keep the Commandments and help other people all we can; but the main thing is to live those twenty splendid years; to do all we can and enjoy all we can. (175)

This is the philosophy of the epicure and the artist: to enjoy and to do, and it lies behind the conception of Cather's other artist figures, in particular the Archbishop who is not so concerned with forwarding the position of the Catholic church in the Southwest as with enriching its cultural and aesthetic life. Dr. Archie, dismissing the case of the tramp, concludes his argument with the appeal to man to realize his life, no matter ^{at} what cost to society.

Ugly accidents happen, Thea; always have and always will. But the failures are swept back into the pile and forgotten. They don't leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don't affect the future. The things that last are the good things. They people who forge ahead and do something, they really count. (176)⁶¹

All the characters in the novel who are connected with religion are Philistines, shallow, worldly or alien to true art.⁶² The chief of these is Thea's own father who misunderstands her nature and her genius completely, and whose attitude is indicated at the beginning

of the novel in his concern for a new-born son rather than for his ill daughter. Peter Kronberg is introduced as pretentious and self-important in his black hat, frock coat and steel-rimmed spectacles (5). He has chosen the church as a form of easy living at the cost of the ladies of the Swedish mission who "skimped and begged and gave church suppers to get the long, lazy youth through the seminary" (19). He speaks only in the language of books, and his sincerity is questioned dubiously: "If he had his sincere moments, they were perforce inarticulate" (19). He does not concern himself about the religion of his children, not from broadmindedness, but from laziness, and his only request is for their "keeping up appearances" (165). He is considered a model preacher, for the "conventional rhetoric" of his sermons pleases, and he observes all the decorum of a minister: "He did not smoke, he never touched spirits. His indulgence in the pleasures of the table was an endearing bond between him and the women of his congregation. He ate enormously with a zest" (189).

His daughter Anna inherits his concern for appearances. During every revival, she asked for the prayers of the congregation and "disseminated a general gloom throughout the household" (166). She is sanctimonious, upholds her position as daughter of a clergyman, and reads sentimental religious story-books (166). She is both fascinated and horrified by the wickedness of Denver, Chicago and Moonstone which extends to the Mexicans and Spanish Johnny, and her opinion of art is indicated in her view that "music was nothing very real and that it did not matter in a girl's relations with people" (167-8). Yet she does not believe either in goodness or in true

humanity, but only in unworldly dedication and ascetism: "It was only in attitudes of protest or reproof, clinging to the cross, that human beings could be even temporarily decent" (168). Anna reproves Thea for her friends, her attitudes, even for playing such secular pieces as "The Blue Danube" waltzes, and when her mother rebukes her, she revenges herself by praying for Mrs. Kronberg's soul.

That this view of religion is general rather than specific is indicated by the Reverend Larson, Kronberg's acquaintance from Divinity College. He too is lazy, and has chosen the ministry as a reaction to the heavy farm work demanded by his ambitious parents. Fond of physical inertia even in his cradle (208), he goes into the ministry because it is the only business where "a man was not all the time pitted against other men who were willing to work themselves to death", and his father is glad to send him to the seminary "to conceal his laziness from the neighbours" (209). He is successful because he gets along well with women, keeps his hands white and well-kept, and enjoys all the entertainments of life:

He slept late in the morning, was fussy about his food, and read a great many novels, preferring sentimental ones. He did not smoke, but he ate a great deal of candy 'for his throat'. . . . He always bought season tickets for the symphony concerts, and he played his violin for women's culture clubs. . . . He could work energetically at almost any form of play. (209-10)

Unlike Kronberg, he does not oppose art but plays at it, seeking it as a form of amusement and social prestige, and his influence on Thea is thus more insidious than that of her father. These three characters, Peter Kronberg, the Reverend Larson and Anna indicate Cather's view of religion at this period. Narrow, conventional,

stereotyped, they represent the religion from which Thea asserts her freedom, and her success is measured against this background of cultural sterility.

Thea's art in Part I, apart from the Mexicans and Wunsch, is harnessed to religion. Although she is teaching pupils during the week, she must sing every Sunday morning, go to choir practice one night a week, and she is conscripted to play the organ and lead the singing at prayer-meeting, since "It won't take much of your time, and it will keep people from talking" (158). The mood of these meetings is mournful, and they are attended by "old women, with perhaps six or eight old men, and a few sickly girls, who had not much interest in life; two of them, indeed, were already preparing to die" (160). Thus religion in the novel becomes ultimately the concern of women, the old, the sickly and all those to whom life is no longer vital or interesting. As in One of Ours it is an escape from life, rather than an identification of life, and Thea is contemptuous of their physical weakness, and their narrow and misguided faith, except for the old lady whom she admires, who prays for her six sons on the railroad and "the engines which race with Death" (162).

Again in Chicago religion dominates Thea's life and Thea exhausts her voice in singing in church choirs, or for weddings and funerals, absorbing her talent in the unimportant activities of society. Even in her work for Bowers, she finds that the city is not unlike the town where she has grown up, and the narrow and stultifying standards of culture are identical. But gradually she moves away from the sphere of religion and its narrow culture, to the broader

world of art, of Fred Ottenburg and Harsayani, of Dresden and ultimately New York. Her concern for religion, her need for its order, never returns, for she has replaced it with the religion of art. Cather's only further reference to religion is in connection with Landry: "He was a Catholic chiefly because his father used to sit in the kitchen and read aloud to his hired men disgusting 'exposures' of the Roman Catholic church, enjoying equally the hideous stories and the outrage of his wife's feelings" (537). This is the only justification for religion, then; as an expression of defiance against family and society. Yet although Thea escapes, Moonstone remains the same and unaltered. Twenty years after we see Thea in New York, the Epilogue returns to Tillie Kronberg, at the time of the Methodist ice cream social. Here Lily Fisher's twins represent the new youth, more like city children, carefully raised and "mindful of the proprieties they have learned at summer hotels" (575), yet still narrow, and unable to understand, any more than the old Moonstone, the qualities of art and of genius which Tillie represents with her stories of Thea and her success. Thus the world of art and society has changed, but the small town, the Methodists, have remained unaltered.

In The Song of the Lark organized religion finds no place in the search for meaning. Beebe suggests that the religion of art becomes increasingly the retreat to an ivory tower where life is replaced by art.⁶³ In The Song of the Lark Thea retreats to this tower:

Her human life is made up of exacting engagements and dull business detail, of shifts to evade an idle, gaping world which is

determined that no artist shall ever do his best. Her artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real. (vi)

Yet she is able to escape through art as Claude is able to escape through the war. It is not until The Professor's House that the religion of art ceases to exist as a way of life.

8. ONE OF OURS: The Artist Manqué

Written in 1922, One of Ours stands at the peak of Cather's disillusionment with the modern world. Before this time, the novels which deal both with the artist and the pioneer, with the exception of Alexander's Bridge, present the triumph of the individual over his environment, "the mind over Nebraska".¹ The three novels to follow; One of Ours, A Lost Lady and The Professor's House lament the failure of art in modern society, and of the artist to come to terms with this society. The Professor, who is like Thea the accomplished artist, lives on "without joy"², for both his youth and his art are dead. Claude, the would-be artist, is unable to create because of his environment, and Marian Forrester, who symbolizes art itself, depends for her values upon the qualities of her possessors; she is heroic in the era of the pioneers, cheap and common in the time of modern commerce.

The central theme of One of Ours is, then, not the war but the failure of art to save America from the modern world.³ Cather's disillusionment is typical of the mood of the twenties in America, which faces the death of Genteel Victorianism in the First World War and seeks new values in the post-war world of the twentieth century. Yet while the expatriates left America temporarily to live abroad in Europe, most of these returned and most of them were just beginning literary careers in which they come to assess this new world and its positive values. Cather on the other hand belongs to a previous

generation of writers, and among these to the female writers who have not faced war in actual fact but only through literature. As a result, the realism of war, apparent in Hemingway, Dos Passos and the younger novelists is replaced by the romanticism of Cather's treatment which combines gory descriptions of actual incidents in the Gothic style of My Ántonia with a romantic interpretation of motive and heroism suspiciously similar to the public propaganda of the era.

The authenticity of the war accounts is not important to the novel, for its centre is not the war itself but the character of Claude, in real life Cather's cousin Charles who was killed in battle in 1918. As Lewis tells us:

She did not choose the war as a theme, and then set out to interpret it through the experience of one individual. The whole story was born from a personal experience. . . . [The] news of her cousin's death at Cantiguay brought suddenly before her an intense realization of his nature and his life, and their significance.⁴

Claude becomes the traditional American hero in conflict with modern American society. Essentially however, the problem is insoluble, and thus the war is introduced to provide a source of escape. As Sergeant points out, Cather's young heroes all die early: Paul, Tom Outland, and Claude.⁵ It is only with the Professor that Cather comes to accept that, while the problem remains insoluble, defeating the artist and destroying his art, it must nevertheless be confronted.

Yet Claude Wheeler is not merely the American hero; he is the artist manqué, "one of hers" as Sergeant observes.⁶ Not actually identified as an artist, he is clearly an author-surrogate and shares the artist's characteristics and viewpoint.⁷ Moreover the novel is,

like the typical artist novel, a quest for self in which the hero pursues the meaning of life and for this rejects all ties of home and country .⁸ This meaning is finally, and ironically, realized in France where Claude is able to say: "I never knew there was anything worth living for, till this war came on. Before that, the world seemed like a business proposition" (419).⁹ Yet although Cather does not accept until The Professor's House that man "cannot evade his psychological fate",¹⁰ nevertheless this fate becomes an important theme of One of Ours and contrasts it directly with The Song of the Lark.

For One of Ours is the closest which Cather comes to a naturalist view of the universe and of human fate. In her introduction to The Song of the Lark Cather observes:

What I cared about, and still care about, was the girl's escape; the play of blind chance, the way in which commonplace occurrences fell together to liberate her from commonness. She seemed wholly at the mercy of accident; but to persons of her vitality and honesty, fortunate accidents will always happen.¹¹

Apart from the fact that these "fortunate accidents" include the death of a would-be fiancé who leaves her his life insurance, a life-long affair with a young beer millionaire and a loan for her education in Germany from the local doctor, grown rich on the stock market, Cather basically denies her theory in the last sentence, for she suggests that essentially fate is determined by character. One of Ours, then, reconsiders this position. Blind chance operates on Claude without the intervention of fortunate accident, and his exceptional qualities, his honesty and his submerged vitality, are unable to save him. While Claude is not Thea Kronberg, and we may find many other reasons for his actual failure, it is clear that as omniscient narrator

Cather attempts to justify Claude's position.

The view that life is a trap, common to the naturalist tradition and in particular, Dreiser's An American Tragedy, is expressed here not only through Claude but through other assorted characters who are supposedly unbiased. This trap is both particular and general.

Mrs. Wheeler believes that fate has intervened in Tom Wested's exchange of his farm for the Wheeler lot in Maine:

It seemed to her that his [Tom's] decline in health and loss of courage, Mr. Wheeler's fortuitous trip to Denver, the old pinewood farm in Maine, were all things that fitted together and made a net to envelop her unfortunate son. (68)

On hearing of Claude's accident with the wire, Ernest Havel comments that Claude is "unlucky": "there was no help for that; it was something rationalism did not explain" (139). This accident leads directly to his marriage, and Claude, remembering the day in their youth when Enid fell into the mill-pond, interprets their association as fated:

"Incidents like that one now seemed to him significant and fateful"

(144). Even the black cat will not leave Claude, and he finally puts her in his pocket: "If you are bad luck, I guess you are going to stay right with me!" (224). But fatalism is much more deeply engrained

in the novel than in its personal application to Claude's life. Enid's father comments to Claude of the illness of his daughter, a missionary in China: "A man hasn't got much control over his own life, Claude.

If it ain't poverty or disease that torments him, it's a name on the map. I could have made out pretty well, if it hadn't been for China, and some other things" (218). The war too is directed by fate, as Ernest Havel observes to Claude: "I tell you, nobody's will has anything to

pretty nearly everything you believe about life--about marriage especially--is lies. I don't know why people prefer to live in that sort of world, but they do" (150). Even Mahailey, a poor half-witted servant, philosophizes uncharacteristically as she watches the minister at Claude and Enid's wedding: "she hoped to catch some visible sign of the miracle he was performing. She always wondered just what it was the preacher did to make the wrongest thing in the world the rightest thing in the world" (193).

Claude's wife Enid is not primarily a person, but a symbol of the mechanistic society, cold, self-interested and deadening, which entraps the creative man and kills his art.¹³ Even in their first kiss, Claude recognizes that they are mis-mated and wished for an escape from the world to which she belongs and which he despises:

Was there nothing in the world outside to answer his own feelings, and was every turn to be fresh disappointment? Why was life so mysteriously hard? This country itself was sad, he thought, looking about him,--and you could no more change that than you could change the story in an unhappy human face. He wished to God he were sick again; the world was too rough a place to get about in. (154)

The artist is not merely a child of the moon, so sensitive and fine that his "wish was so beautiful that there were no experiences in this world to satisfy it" (207). He must be sheltered from this alien world, escape through sickness if necessary, to preserve his "unappeased longings and futile dreams" from the coarseness of modern society (207-8). These are not the words of Alexandra Bergson, of Thea Kronberg or Antonia. Each of these heroines faced society heroically and succeeded in the face of opposition, even because of it. There is a deeper feeling of frustration here, one not explained by the

circumstances of the story or the characters who appear in it, but attributable only to Cather's own disillusionment, as the naive and shallow idealism of Claude is attributable to Cather's increasing lack of realism and perspective. Society has always been opposed to the artist in Cather's fiction, but now the artist, the love of the beautiful, is no longer strong. He is moulded by his environment, weak and impotent, with only the sensibility of the artist which keeps him miserable in an alien society.¹⁴ And the only solution for him is escape through death:

The débris of human life was more worthless and ugly than the dead and decaying things in nature. Rubbish. . . junk. . . his mind could not picture anything that so exposed and condemned all the dreary, weary, ever-repeated actions by which life is continued from day to day. Actions without meaning. . . . How much better it would be if people could go to sleep like the fields; could be blanketed down under the snow, to wake with their defeats forgotten. (223)

The war provides this escape for Claude and the young men of his generation, for France is a refuge from the shallow American society of "buying and selling, building and pulling down" (406). Here he finds a life related to nature and art, a life of values which have been lost with the pioneers in America: "Life had after all, turned out well for him, and everything had a noble significance" (411). And he is happy, for he dies, "believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with" (458). As his mother comments, "God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end" (459). But this suffering remains to the young men who come back from France to recognize life in America for what it is, and human life seems

"uglier than it had ever done before" (457), the Red Sea of meanness and greed sweeping across to annihilate all value and to spread evil. And while the novel concludes with Mahailey's belief that Claude is "up yonder" with God, Cather's own pessimism indicates clearly her own mood at this time that no faith can save us from the dilemma of our society.¹⁵

The major critical problem of One of Ours is its treatment of the war, a treatment which, despite Edith Lewis' remark that Cather did not choose the war as theme, is nevertheless integral to the novel as a whole. As Sergeant points out, the war climax is unconvincing to anyone who has experienced the Second World War: "War was a story to Willa No soldier she had met on Broadway had told her the truth of it. He couldn't. He wouldn't. Neither would, nor could, I".¹⁶

In her story, there are a few smelly corpses, but no profanity, no sex, no rebellion, no chaos are even hinted at. Avaricious French peasants, whom we used to hear of in the First World War as exploiting our doughboys, are absent. Instead we meet comprehending French people of the upper and lower bourgeoisie. The sense of order, veracity, and politesse are such that the army as an institution is fully upheld, and Claude's fulfilment in a heroic death suffers no disillusion, till the last pages and sentences of the book. This is, no doubt, why Willa Cather received the Pulitzer Prize for One of Ours. Thousands of American parents and many American veterans, too, saw the rewards of their sacrifices here displayed gloriously. The intellectual and more humanly or philosophically conscious, veteran found the war narrative "off the beam".¹⁷

Mencken is even more outspoken, remarking that "the war she depicts. . . is fought out not in France but on a Hollywood movie-lot. Its American soldiers are idealists engaged upon a crusade to put down sin; its Germans are imbeciles".¹⁸ After Dos Passos' Three Soldiers

of 1921 he claimed; "no war story can be written in the United States without comparison with it. . . . At one blast it disposed of oceans of romance and blather. It changed the whole tone of American opinion about the war. . . . It took his bold realism to disentangle their [the veterans'] recollections from the prevailing buncombe and sentimentality". Cather's account, he concludes, is "precious near the war of the standard model of lady novelist".¹⁹ Wagenknecht calls the war section a tour de force²⁰, and Footman, "a romantic projection of Claude's ideal, almost his creation".²¹ Certainly there is much truth in Howard Mumford Jones' remark: "The World War exists only that Claude may die obscurely in it for the reason that thus to die satisfied his self-respect".²²

The importance of the war episodes raises the problem of structure as a whole. Footman remarks that the "conflict between Claude and the modern communal world has caused the novel to crack in the middle"²³ and Hicks, that the second part bears no relation to the issues raised in connection with Claude's unhappiness in Nebraska: "For Miss Cather, as for Claude, the war provides an escape from an apparently insoluble problem".²⁴ Even allowing the necessity of Book V, much of which even Daiches considers to be "tedious and seemingly naive"²⁵, there is little justification for Book IV, "The Anchises," which is tenuously related to the whole novel.²⁶ The epilogue too is intrusive. Brown compares One of Ours to The Song of the Lark in structure, as a novel of development; each begins in the West, moves eastward and to Europe, and returns in the epilogue to relate the effects of this development on those left behind.²⁷ Nevertheless, the

change of tone is abrupt; up to this point, the omniscient narrator has not only sympathized with Claude but shared his point of view. Her bitter reversal in the Epilogue is not prepared for and provides an ironic twist to the viewpoint of the rest of the novel. As Daiches concludes: "the book is structurally broken-backed".²⁸

Despite its flaws the novel ~~was~~ one of Cather's favourites, and certainly the favourite of many Americans. Her remarks to Sergeant are significant:

The book was selling, Willa told me, ahead of Babbitt in some Mid-west cities. (That was the first time she had ever mentioned sales.) She really felt pleased with her story; she had been able to carry out her own intention. In fact she was (critics or not), just discovering how to write; intended (belligerently) to go on learning.²⁹

Edith Lewis reflects accurately contemporary opinion, quoting a soldier who had been in France for three years: "I think that One of Ours is the most perfect picture of the war that I have ever read".³⁰ And its general popularity is evidenced by its choice for the Pulitzer Prize of 1922. For despite its pessimism, it is an affirmation of certain ideals of American society, and to the mothers who had lost sons, it provided a fitting memorial to "one of ours".³¹

Yet while Claude finds the end of his quest in France, as Jim finds his in the Land and Antonia, Cather once more fails in her own search for meaning. As Sergeant observes, Claude died to save his illusions but Cather discarded hers.³² In A Lost Lady and The Professor's House she continues to explore the failure of art and the victory of the modern commercial world. But from this point on, her direction is determined, a direction away from society and increasingly

towards a refuge whether physical or spiritual. Claude Wheeler she claimed to be "her favourite of all her heroes" and Sergeant asks "Was it because he was almost a piece of herself, left behind in Red Cloud?"³³ And with the death of Claude, something of herself seemed to die too; her enthusiasm for the sheer exuberance of living never appears again.

Man and Nature: "The End of the Cycle"

In One of Ours Cather returns to the view of nature which appears in the early short stories, the nature of isolation and loneliness, of cultural sterility and philosophical meaninglessness. However these early short stories do look to the future, to the cities and to art as a goal for its young men. The view of nature in One of Ours differs from these, then, as well as from O Pioneers!, My Antonia, and The Song of the Lark where the land provides for the artist a source of power and a spring of inspiration, or at least a centre of stability in the midst of flux. Here the prairie retains its splendour, but this splendour has no longer a meaning for man; the young generation faces this emptiness with no possibility of escape, for there is nowhere in America to escape to:

Now that he [Claude] was back in Denver he had that feeling of loneliness which often overtakes country boys in a city; the feeling of being unrelated to anything, of not mattering to anybody. . . . Over there, in the golden light, the mass of mountains was splitting up into four distinct ranges, and as the sun dropped lower the peaks emerged in perspective, one behind the other. It was a lonely splendour that only made the ache in his breast the stronger. . . . The statue of Kit Carson on horseback, down in the Square, pointed Westward; but there was no West in that sense, any more. There was still South America; perhaps he could find something below the Isthmus. Here the sky was like a lid shut down over the world. (117-8)

Cather's article "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle" indicates Cather's position at this time, as reflected in the "sunset of the pioneer" theme of One of Ours and A Lost Lady.³⁴ The close bond of man and the soil no longer exists, the bond which has been the centre of life for Alexandra and the salvation of Jim Burden. Although the land remains, cultivated and fertile, its ploughed fields still bearing the crop of the world as in My Antonia, society is no longer centred in the land. The old pioneers challenged nature and triumphed over her, but the new world is concerned not with struggle and the search for beauty but with utility and commercial profit; it drains the Forrester marshland to sow wheat and reap profit. The thesis of One of Ours is that nature has been destroyed in America, that it is no longer possible to live the simple existence of the frontier in the West or indeed the "New" World; Claude must return to France to find these sources of beauty which his ancestors found in America. And so ironically the New World becomes old and the Old World the new Eden.

However Cather is not consistent in her expression of nature in the novel. In an interview to the Omaha World Herald, she explains "I have cut out all picture-making because that boy [Claude] does not see pictures. It was hard to cease to do the thing I do best, but we all have to pay a price for everything we accomplish".³⁸ But Cather does occasionally describe the West, and she does describe rural France in detail, although these descriptions are literary and conventional and lack the vitality of her prairies and her deserts. Moreover, Claude goes to France to find not the lost nature of the New World, but the lost culture which is being violated in the very

heart of France itself by a mechanistic German society.³⁶ While this culture is properly found in Paris, which Cather describes as the centre of the cultural world, yet it is in rural France that Claude finds his salvation and a meaning in existence.³⁷ Claude is not essentially different from Jim Burden in situation, certainly not from Thea Kronberg. He has equal opportunity to appreciate the land, equal opportunity to escape from its bondage by asserting himself. Claude's tragedy is really his inability to find himself, even to look; his central problem lies in his own nature, and this nature is affected strongly by Cather's pessimism in this period of her life. She weaves a net of fatality around Claude to demonstrate what life would be like if she too had been unable to escape.³⁸

The "sunset of the pioneer"³⁹ is represented in the novel by the figure of Mr. Wheeler, the modern representative of this heroic and lost breed, which now exists only in art as in the statue of Kit Carson. Mr. Wheeler too has come to the great open West to challenge it and to bring it under man's control:

[He] had come to this part of Nebraska when the Indians and the buffalo were still about, remembered the grasshopper year and the big cyclone, had watched the farms emerge one by one from the great rolling page where once only the wind wrote its story. He had encouraged new settlers to take up homesteads, urged on courtships, lent young fellows the money to marry on, seen families grow and prosper; until he felt a little as if all this were his own enterprise. The changes, not only those the years made, but those the seasons made, were interesting to him. (6)

There were no roads or fences on the land when the Wheelers were first married, and Mrs. Wheeler tells her sons "one winter night she sat on the roof of their first dugout nearly all night, holding up a lantern tied to a pole to guide Mr. Wheeler home through a snow-

storm" (95).

Mr. Wheeler has the physical stamina of the pioneer, never suffering from "anything more perplexing than toothache or boils" (7). He is acute in land speculation like Alexandra, whose acreage too increased with the years, is active in politics and informed about world affairs. Yet he lacks one of the primary characteristics of the Cather pioneer, idealism and the devotion to a cause. The modern descendent of the pioneers, Mr. Wheeler like Ivy Peters desecrates nature. His father had preserved a timber lot in Maine of which he was so proud that he would not sell it to the saw-mill (66). But Mr. Wheeler trades it at a considerable profit, "a pleasant old farm that didn't bring in anything for a grama-grass ranch which ought to turn over a profit of ten or twelve thousand dollars in good cattle years" (66). And he cuts down the cherry tree loaded with fruit, to leave it lying on the ground a "bleeding stump" because Mrs. Wheeler complained that the cherries were too high to reach. As Claude watches the tree wither and die, he vows "God would surely punish a man who could do that" (28). Wheeler's three sons typify the generation following the pioneer: Bayliss, the Prohibitionist who is for all forms of commercial profit and against all stimulants including coffee; Ralph, the mechanical genius who understands all forms of machinery; and Claude, the discontented idealist, isolated from both nature and society and finding ironically a meaning for life in the centre of meaninglessness, war.

Despite his basic Western idealism, Claude turns away from the land. He finds in the treatment of the little restaurant woman

Mrs. Voigt by the workingmen a geniality "common only in what he broadly called 'the West'" (36) and calls the ship's doctor from Canada "a strange fellow to come from Canada, the land of big men and rough" (313). Yet he seeks for a meaning in art, despite the words of the singer Wilhelmina Schroeder-Schatz, who says that the way of art is hard (60): "If I were a young man, I would begin to acquire land, and I would not stop until I had a whole country" (59).

Claude is offered the Nebraska farm by his father, to manage as he wishes, yet the land has become "a net" to envelop Claude and prevent his escape (68). The very gift that liberated Alexandra prevents Claude's development and he rejects the whole principle of land and property: "The people who had it were slaves to it, and the people who didn't were slaves to them" (80). His return to the farm after his fall visit to the Erlichs indicates his despair concerning his role in life: "He belonged out in the big, lonely country, where people worked hard with their backs and got tired like horses, and were too sleepy at night to think of anything to say" (84). His journey home is symbolically through "the bleak winter country. . . deeper and deeper into reality" (84) and even in France, his nightmares still concern his failure to escape from the loneliness and isolation of the prairies "the furrowed brown earth, stretching from horizon to horizon" (411).

Claude does turn to the land in the springtime for joy and fulfilment, finding in the fresh-cut grass, the warm winds, the daffodils and hyacinths bright in the grass (117) and the bursting of the cottonwoods and the willows into bloom, a joy and fulfilment

which he shares with Alexandra and Jim Burden:

All over the dusty, tan-coloured wheat-fields there was a tender mist of green,--millions of little fingers reaching up and waving lightly in the sun. To the north and south Claude could see the corn-planters, moving in straight lines over the brown acres where the dust had been harrowed so fine that it blew off in clouds of dust to the roadside. . . . It seemed as if there were a lark on every fence-post, singing for everything that was dumb; for the great ploughed lands, and the heavy horses in the rows, and the men guiding the horses. (120)

But the predominant mood of the Nebraska sections is not lyric but pessimistic.

The role of the farmer in society has changed, and the farmer himself has changed, become materialistic and concerned with appearances rather than real values:

The farmer raised and took to market things with an intrinsic value; wheat and corn as good as could be grown anywhere in the world, hogs and cattle that were the best of their kind. In return he got manufactured articles of poor quality; showy furniture that went to pieces, carpets and draperies that faded, clothes that made a handsome man look like a clown. Most of his money was paid out for machinery,--and that, too, went to pieces. (101)

These farmers have cut down the old cottonwood groves and osage orange hedges because; "nobody had them any more". Like the draining of the Forrester marshes, the cutting of the trees symbolizes the separation of society from the beauty and order of nature, and the substitution of material values for aesthetic ones:

With prosperity came a kind of callousness; everybody wanted to destroy the old things they used to take pride in. The orchards, which had been nursed and tended so carefully twelve years ago, were now left to die of neglect. It was less trouble to run into town in an automobile and buy fruit than it was to raise it. . . . Now, they were continually having lawsuits. Their sons were either stingy and grasping, or extravagant and lazy, and they were always stirring up trouble. Evidently, it took more intelligence to spend money than to make it. (102)

Ralph represents the mechanistic side of this society; to Claude it seems that he "would never do anything or make anything the world needed" (102). Yet Ralph is able to repair any sort of machinery, to keep the automobiles and the machinery on the farm in perfect working condition whereas Claude himself does nothing, either productively or culturally! The hired men, Dan and Jerry, are no longer romanticized and nobly heroic like Otto and Jake in My Ántonia or the trainmen of The Song of the Lark but "the roughest and dirtiest hired men in the country" (2), guilty of "wanton carelessness" in leaving four steers to die in a blizzard (4) and ^{of} mistreating the animals, by using the old mare to drive the cultivator after she has stepped on a board with a nail. Even the refuge by the creek, the favourite spot which recurs in Alexandra's Bridge, My Ántonia, The Professor's House and "The Enchanted Bluff", is no longer inviolate. Its stream trickles along coolly in the lazy noon, shaded by willow trees on the sandy bottom, but it is disturbed by motors dashing by, leaving "a cloud of dust and smell of gasoline" (11).

The land provides the security of money, of social rank, of established routine, but Claude's restlessness rejects this security for some hazy and indefinable ideal which is connected with the cultural world of the Erlichs: "He didn't find this kind of life worth the trouble of getting up every morning. He could not see the use of working for money, when money brought nothing one wanted" (102-3).

Claude does find in nature a temporary refuge from the problems of his existence and, in particular, his marriage which represents a connection to his society which he cannot escape. The timber claim

is not only a "paradise for birds" (184), but a refuge where Claude can feel "unmarried and free" (212), free not only from Enid but from the sterile society which she represents. In this timber claim he meets his youthful self, like the Professor who returns to his primitive self in a cave by the sea or in the woods⁴⁰:

To lie in the hot sun and look up at the stainless blue of the autumn sky, to hear the dry rustle of the leaves as they fell, to hear bold squirrels leaping from branch to branch; to lie thus and let his imagination play with life--that was the best he could do. His thoughts, he told himself, were his own. He was no longer a boy. He went off into the timber claim to meet a young man more experienced and interesting than himself, who had not tied himself up with compromises. (212)

While Thea's lethargy under the sun leads to action, and she renounces it for activity, Claude's like the Professor's is a way of escape from an intolerable situation. But while the Professor must ultimately face his problem, the problem of middle-age and the meaning of life, another escape is provided for Claude, the escape of the war.

For in France Claude realizes his indefinable dreams, in a way which is never made clear to the reader. Its country provides a refuge from America and the shallow society of "buying and selling, building and pulling down" (406). Cather's idealization of the peace and order of rural France is apparent as early as 1903 in her account of her trip to Europe:

Arles is the centre of a large pastoral district, a great country of shepherd kings and farmer barons, of fat priests, of old customs and simple living....They desire to live honourably and long, to marry their daughters well, and to have strong sons to succeed them, to avoid innovation and change, to drink their Muscat wine and eat their boiled snails and tomatoes fried in oil to the end.⁴¹

In One of Ours we first see Europe through the memory of Ernest Havel, who remembers peaceful country scenes, green hills and behind them, a wall of mountains covered in pine forests, a creek winding through the meadows, brown fields, and Ernest's mother, her face "as brown and furrowed as the fields, and her eyes were pale blue, like the skies of early spring" (137). The dream-like quality of this description which contrasts with the realism in the depiction of Nebraska, is maintained in the later passages. While Cather does not describe the prairies, on the excuse that Claude is not capable of "picture-making", she does describe rural France in terms which are conventionally pictorial and basically static:

Deeper and deeper into flowery France! . . . Fields of wheat, fields of oats, fields of rye; all the low hills and rolling uplands clad with the harvest. And everywhere in the grass, in the yellowing grain, along the road-bed, the poppies spilling and streaming. (339)

France becomes in the novel an Eden, a return to the Paradise which America had ironically promised the citizens of the Old World; here "the Americans came to life as if they were new men, just created in a new world" (433), young Adams in a new garden of beauty and order and Eves (436), rediscovered after many generations of loss.

France represents what America might have become, the dreams it might have realized. It suggests the Nebraska fields uncorrupted by machinery, with its cottonwoods which seem "as if they had been there for ever and would be there for ever more" (340), while the modern Americans cut them down to plant maples and ashes; it has even the same evening primroses in the de Courcy's garden which grow along the banks of Lovely Creek (388). This country-side represents

the French spirit and the French preservation of the ideal of the beautiful which America has repudiated, even in the midst of despoilation. The land becomes a symbol of French culture. Mademoiselle de Courcy tells Claude: "You have seen our poor trees? It make one ashamed for this beautiful part of France. Our people are more sorry for them than to lose their cattle and horses" (387), and Claude is impressed by the French love for the land and its beauty: "How much it must mean to a man to love his country like this. . . to love its trees and flowers; to nurse it when it was sick, and tend it hurts" (387). The French spirit is enduring, despite the despoilation of German materialism; in the midst of the cellar holes filled with muddy water, the broken stone and brick, twisted iron and splintered beams, the flowers grow, the poppies, Queen Anne's lace and cornflowers, "blue and white and red, as if the French colours came up spontaneously out of the French soil, no matter what the Germans did to it" (381). Nature represents continuity, changelessness in the midst of change. It outreaches the life of human beings, part of the past and of the future, as Claude observes in watching the rosiness of sunlight on pine trunks, shining "as it used to do in the summer. . . as it would do in all the years to come, when they were not there to see it" (410). Despite the death of their son and brother, the Fleury's garden has not changed, its white roses and linden trees reminding David of the past: "They have kept it up, in spite of everything" (412), and again "How everything has changed, and yet how everything is still the same. It's like coming back to places in dreams" (414).

The countryside is idealized, like the French people, vaguely classical and remote from every day life like a land of dreams. Near the Jouberts there is a "grassy glade" with little white birches, the trees overgrown with emerald moss; across the river, the pine trunks divide into two "like the pictures of old Grecian lyres" (353) and the golden tones of the land represent the golden and dream-like quality of the rural life of the people, to preserve which essentially Claude dies:

They found the land of France turning gold. All along the river valleys the poplars and cottonwoods had changed from green to yellow,--evenly coloured, looking like candle-flames in the mist and rain. Across the fields, along the horizon they ran, like torches passed from hand to hand, and all the willows by the little streams had become silver. The vineyards were green still, thickly spotted with curly, blood-red branches. It all flashed back beside his pillow in the dark: this beautiful land, this beautiful people, this beautiful omelette; gold poplars, blue-green vineyards, wet, scarlet vine-leaves, rain dripping into the court, fragrant darkness. . . . (403-4)

Yet even in his dream, the golden scene is stained with blood-red, the sacrifice which France and her allies have made to preserve its beauty and its culture unviolated. These idyllic descriptions alternating with battlescenes, which too are almost unreal and romanticized in their accentuation of the grisly and the bizarre, depict the two extremes of France and indeed of the world, the horror and the glory, the ugliness and the beauty, death and life.

Claude dies to save France and its rural beauty, both its nature and its art. But his death is ironic for this world cannot be saved and America does not want this way of life. As Cather had said in her essay "Nebraska: The End of the Cycle":

In Nebraska as in so many other States, we must face the fact

that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished, and that no new story worthy to take its place has yet begun. The generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the virgin prairie is passing, but it is still there, a group of rugged figures in the background which inspires respect, compels admiration. With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory. . . . The generation now in middle age. . . [is] very much interested in material comfort, in buying whatever is expensive and ugly. . . . They want to buy everything ready-made: clothes, food, education, music, pleasure.⁴²

Claude is the last descendant of the old generation of America and he dies in vain as a sacrifice to art.

Man and Art: "these children of the moon" (207)

If The Song of the Lark is Cather's "Portrait of the Artist", then One of Ours might perhaps be her "Sorrows of Young Werther", which Beebe describes as one of Goethe's central studies of "would-be artists who failed to become Goethes".⁴³ Claude does not become a Willa Cather, not only because death prevents his flowering as in the case of David Gerhardt, but also because, unlike Thea, he is unable to escape from the provincialism of his environment which now has broadened to extend to the whole of the American way of life. But to dismiss the qualities of the artist in Claude is to miss the point of the novel. For Claude, who like Thea is the structural centre of the novel, is modelled not only on Cather's cousin, Charles P. Cather who was killed during the First World War and whose death inspired the idea of the novel, but also on a student of Cather's during her Pittsburgh days, Fred Dimmler, a portrait painter also killed in the war.⁴⁴ And again as in The Song of the Lark, the double source explains many inconsistencies in the central character.

Claude's role as the artist is implied rather than explicit

in the novel. To return to Beebe's definition:

I am using the term "artist" to mean anyone capable of creating works of art, whether literary, musical, or visual. In fact. . . some of the characters I discuss are only potential artists, and a few are not identified as artists at all, though they are obviously surrogates for their authors.⁴⁵

Cather's identification with Claude is in fact so close that she is blind to the flaws of the novel, and continues to assert that he is her favourite hero.⁴⁶ The typical artist-novel, Beebe notes, presents the quest of the hero for self, a self which is usually in opposition to society, so that the hero is in effect an exile. He pursues this self through the rejection of all ties, domestic, social and religious; he "reject[s] the claims of love and life, of God, home and country, until nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as an artist".⁴⁷ If there can be said to be a theme of One of Ours, this theme is Claude's search for self which he finds ironically in war on the battlefields of France, the country which Cather idealizes for its beauty and order, its preservation of the past, and its denial of mechanism and commercialism represented by both the opponents, America and Germany. Claude rejects the ties of his home and of his marriage (although Enid is conveniently removed to China to obscure this), and goes to France, not really to save his country but to seek the meaning of life which he cannot find in America and to preserve the French heritage from violation.

Claude Wheeler is a complex figure, and one not completely resolvable in psychological terms.⁴⁸ On one hand, he is specifically defined as non-artistic. Cather explains that she has rejected "all picture-making because that boy does not see pictures" (172)⁴⁹ and

Claude himself bitterly laments his artistic ineptitude when he simultaneously envies and admires David Gerhardt, the young man who has already become an acknowledged violinist at twenty-six:

What would it mean to be able to do anything as well as that, to have a hand capable of delicacy and precision and power? If he had been taught to do anything at all, he would not be sitting here tonight, a wooden thing amongst living people. He felt that a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it; tongue-tied, foot-tied, hand-tied. If one were born into this world like a bear-cub or a bull-calf, one could only paw and upset things, break and destroy, all one's life. (418)

In The Song of the Lark Cather differentiated between innate talent "in der Brust",⁵⁰ and technical development of this, or training. Here however, she infers first that Claude has the talent and the desire, but that he has been unable to escape his environment, and then that he has only the desire without the innate talent, like a bear-cub who will never turn into the artist, no matter what his environment. It is clear however that Claude defines life from the point of view of the Catherian artist.⁵¹

For Claude Wheeler has more than the desire of the artist; unlike Paul of "Paul's Case", he attracts artists as well as being attracted by them. He is not simply sympatico, in Schmittlein's terms, but afficionado.⁵² His relationship with David Gerhardt is not in itself singular, for Gerhardt is basically isolated and alone, and he is thrown into contact with Claude through their official capacities. But Mrs. Erlich's interest is more unusual. When her cousin Wilhelmina Schroeder-Schatz, soloist with the Chicago Opera Company, comes to visit her, Mrs. Erlich singles out Claude as her particular guest: "You will see; your cousin Wilhelmina will be

more interested in that boy than in any of the others!" (57). The reasons for this interest are never explained, but indeed the great singer does single Claude out of the group: "we must have a little talk together. We have been very far separated" (59). She later laments that Mrs. Erlich is not young enough to marry Claude, although the latter even speaks of his abilities ironically, for when Claude admits that he does not know musical notes apart, she replies: "I may want the piano moved yet; you could do that for me, eh?" (60). These latent possibilities in Claude are never actualized, nor are they even concretely suggested through his abilities. The only explanation for this unique quality is that Cather wishes it to be so, to see Claude as the unfulfilled artist who is inhibited by his environment from actualizing his innate talents.

Claude has, too, the idealism of the artist, the drive to achieve an ideal and to find in this ideal a meaning for life. This search or quest is almost as vague as that of Paul for beauty in a life of drab materialism, but while Paul's quest is clearly ironic, Cather seems to take Claude's quest seriously. The irony lies not in his total inability to realize himself, but in his search for a dream which can never be realized because of the nature of America, and the modern world. Claude rejects this world of materialism and of financial security on the farm for his dream of splendour:

Sometimes he thought security was what was the matter with everybody. . . . The old belief flashed up in him with an intense kind of hope, an intense kind of pain,--the conviction that there was something splendid about life, if he could but find it!
(102-3)

The artist, Claude believes, is a "child of the moon", an idealistic

person whose dreams are so fine that he cannot be satisfied by this world and this form of existence. For the artistic soul of man is captivated in the physical prison of his body:

Inside of living people, too, captives languished, Yes, inside of people who walked and worked in the broad sun, there were captives dwelling in darkness,--never seen from birth to death. Into those prisons the moon shone, and the prisoners crept to the windows and looked out with mournful eyes at the white globe which betrayed no secrets and comprehended all. . . . The people whose hearts were set high needed such intercourse--whose wish was so beautiful that there were no experiences in this world to satisfy it. And these children of the moon, with their unappeased longings and futile dreams, were a finer race than the children of the sun. (207-8)

Although Claude has suggested that even in Mrs. Royce and Bayliss there might be an imprisoned soul, he later rejects this to oppose the "children of the sun" to the "children of the moon". The artist has become not a doer, an achiever like the old pioneers and like Thea, but a dreamer who intuits the beauty of experience and no longer has the need or desire to recreate this beauty in the form of art. Thea too finds in the moonlight a source of inspiration and dreams, but she throbs with vital activity; she is restless to capture her passion and translate it into her art. Her physical body is not a prison but an instrument to achieve her desire.⁵³ Cather's whole concept of the artist has changed as a result of her pessimism after 1922.

Claude shares as well the love of the "comely life" typical of Cather's artists and her sympathetic figures: Harsanyi, the Professor, the Archbishop, Auclair, Fred Ottenburg and Dr. Archie. It is notable that Thea herself has little time for this enjoyment of life; it is left for her moral and emotional supporters to devote

themselves to the life of comfort. As Cather progresses, the life of the salon and domestic art begins to take precedence over the present realization of creativity, and finally the Archbishop is more concerned over the amenities of life than he is over his cathedral.

Claude's love of this life contrasts with his family's interest in material things. Claude wishes to take Ernest Havel to dinner at the hotel but: "In the Wheeler family a new thrasher or a new automobile was ordered without a question, but it was considered extravagant to go to a hotel for dinner" (10). Claude wears his shirt a second day, and a collar with a broken edge, "wretched economies he had been trained to observe" (39), and travels from Lincoln to Frankfort in a dirty day-coach: "to take a Pullman for a daylight journey was one of the things a Wheeler did not do" (31). Part of his dislike for his father stems from Mr. Wheeler's pose as the antithesis of this culture: his shirt bulges over his stomach, his table manners are gross, his jokes crude and tasteless. At times Claude accepts this morality rebelliously, at times rejects it, as when he sends Mrs. Erlich a box of red roses—"something a Wheeler didn't do" (45).

Although Claude later claims that he discovers the meaning of life only in France, in actuality, he has found it in the Erlich home in Lincoln, for the Erlichs "knew how to live", and this quality of living is achieved through "judicious indulgence in almost everything he had been taught to shun" (43).⁵⁴ Their living room is the centre of culture, domestic, literary, musical and personal, and Claude wishes that he could live here among the well-read and interesting books, the piano with its engraving of Napoleon and a portrait of

Mrs. Erlich's great grandfather who had been an officer in Napoleon's army, its plaster bust of Byron on the mantel and its table covered with boxes of tobacco, pipes and a Chinese bowl of cigarettes (40-42). These things all speak of a rich tradition and heritage from the past of Europe and the East, even of stability, for when Claude later returns after his position on the farm, he finds the room unchanged:

He told himself that he must not hope to find things the same. But they were the same. . . . What was it that made life seem so much more interesting here than elsewhere? There was nothing wonderful about this room; a lot of books, a lamp. . . comfortable, hard-used furniture, some people whose lives were in no way remarkable--and yet he had the sense of being in a warm and gracious atmosphere, charged with generous enthusiasms and ennobled by romantic friendships. (82-3)

At the Erlichs the art of personal relations is developed; there is no "poisonous reticence", no awkwardness or distrust or tension (41), and the University boys who drop in discuss with the family the new girl in town, the latest football game, theatre, books or people. They contrast completely with his own home where: "Since you never said anything, you didn't form the habit of thinking. If you got too much bored, you went to town and bought something new" (44). And at the centre of this life of the salon is Mrs. Erlich herself, who like Mrs. Fields suggests a lady in old daguerrotypes, her skin like white flowers in the rain, her eyes expectant, "always watching to see everything turn out wonderfully well" (41), looking at Claude "as if even he might turn out wonderfully well" (43). She plays the piano, hums sentimental German songs to herself as she works, and beats into the Christmas cakes among the ingredients "the fragrance of old friendships, the glow of early memories, belief in wonder-working rhymes and songs" (45). The

Erlichs then are opposed to Bayliss Wheeler who asserts contemptuously that they will never make money: "They're too fond of good living. They pay their interest and spend whatever's left on entertaining their friends" (90).

The Farmers on Lovely Creek represent also the life of culture and the salon, although Gladys as a pianist also represents the artist. Their parlour, though shabby, is comfortable with stuffed chairs and folding tables and a large oil painting of Mrs. Farmer's father, a Judge, framed in heavy gold moulding (108-9). Both Gladys and her mother have round, low voices "different from the high Western voice" (108). Gladys suggests a Flemish portrait in her red lips, brown eyes and white hands (107), and Claude remembers her in the ironed muslin dressed of her youth when she was his "aesthetic proxy" (112-3). This role she retains in the novel, and Daiches observes that "Claude goes to France to find what Gladys thinks she stands for".⁵⁵

Gladys is the only real musician in Frankfurt and Claude believes firmly "it was a hard destiny to be the exceptional person in the community, to be more gifted or more intelligent than the rest" (180). For she fears her society; she will not go to see the Chicago Opera Company in Omaha for fear that her salary will be cut. And she allows Bayliss Wheeler, the symbol of the modern society which is destroying her, to court her with a box of chocolates in her mother's parlour. Her life, she believes is "squeezed into an unnatural shape by the domination of people like Bayliss": "all things which might make the world beautiful--love and kindness, leisure and art--were shut up in prison and that successful men like Bayliss held the keys" (155). Her weak-

ness symbolizes the inability of art to conquer in the modern world. The only representatives of imagination and art who survive are the weak and ineffectual:

Miss Livingstone, the fiery emotional old maid who couldn't tell the truth; old Mr. Smith, a lawyer without clients, who read Shakespeare and Dryden all day long in his dusty office; Bobbie Jones, the effeminate drug clerk, who wrote free verse and 'movie' scenarios, and tended the soda water fountain. (155)

The contrast between Gladys and Bayliss, indeed between two societies, is accentuated in the comments on the old Trevor place, on the top of a hill with a fine cottonwood grove behind it. Gladys has long loved it and dreamed of it, feeling as if it were her own, but Bayliss comments that he will buy the place and "Of course, if I decide to live there, I'll pull down that old trap and put up something modern" (111). For Bayliss represents perfectly the town-mentality and its non-art. Even as a child he was interested in arithmetic and geography rather than Robinson Crusoe and when his mother told him stories before he could read, he "began to prove to her how they could not possibly be true" (88). His attitude to education is indicated by his comment on Julius Erlich's decision to be a professor: "What's the matter with him? Does he have poor health?" (90). To Claude, Bayliss and Gladys are like the sun and the moon, two opposing forces which meet only "by appointment" (163-4).

While Gladys and Claude are obviously complements, and a marriage between them would be ideal, they are not allowed to marry, not for any real reason but because a fortunate marriage will not suit Cather's thesis. It is not simply the irony of life that each chooses his opposite. Indeed Gladys despises Bayliss and there is no justification

for her acceptance of his courtship. There is no quarrel, no misunderstanding. As Jim cannot marry *Ántonia*, so Claude cannot marry Gladys, a fact decreed by fate in the form of the omniscient author. For Cather's judgement on America is clear and devastating. In America Claude must fail and Gladys remarks that if he is doomed to fail "then life was not worth the chagrin it held for a passionate heart" (156).

It is in France and the war that Claude achieves his quest for meaning in life. For Cather, France had long been the centre of true civilization and culture. To Sergeant she remarked early that Paris had "the tranquility of an old, comprehensible civilization"⁵⁶ and in 1917, while writing *My Ántonia*; the French have "values, aims, a point of view, and have acquired wisdom from the eternal verities. One did not find anything of that sort in the Middle West"⁵⁷. This contrast lies at the heart of *One of Ours*, as Cather explicitly states: "Paris seemed suddenly to have become the capitál, not of France, but of the world! . . . the city which had meant so much through all the centuries--but had never meant so much before. Its name had come to have the purity of an abstract idea" (172-3). In later years Cather was to say "it takes the right kind of American to go to France--one with character and depth and passion for the things that lie deep behind French history and French art".⁵⁸

Claude is partially prepared to become "the right kind of American" through his history paper on Joan of Arc whom he makes into a living figure with a living background; before that time "he had never seen a map of France, and had a very poor opinion of any place farther away than Chicago" (62). This first contact widens the narrow

scope of his provincialism to make him receptive to new ideas about France. His first view of France supports its importance as the end of the quest:

He had always thought of his destination as a country shattered and desolated,--"bleeding France"; but he had never seen anything that looked so strong, so self-sufficient, so fixed from the first foundation, as the coast that rose before him. It was like a pillar of eternity. The ocean lay submissive at its feet, and over it was the great meekness of early morning. This grey wall, unshaken, mighty, was the end of the long preparation, as it was the end of the sea. It was the reason for everything that had happened in his life for the last fifteen months. (319)

Significantly it is morning when they reach France, as the coming of war brings "sunrise on the prairie" (Book III).

As Daiches remarks, Claude "comes to identify the threatened Paris with all that is valuable in the European spirit".⁵⁹ Yet despite Cather's emphasis on Paris itself as the centre of civilization, it never appears in the novel; it is in rural France that Claude finds the beauty and individuality necessary for works of art. As Brown points out:

For Claude, France is the Church of Saint-Ouen at Rouen, with its arches, windows, and chimes; the glades in the forests, green beyond a Nebraskan's imagination; the devotion of the people to their flowers and their cooking; the language that "couldn't be mumbled, that had to be spoken with energy or fire or not at all"; the bright, sympathetic understanding of French women; above all, the interweaving with the lives of individuals of something lasting and strong that sustains them.⁶⁰

This picture of France is idealized, never actualized. The natural descriptions have an artificial quality, a picturesque effect. The characters are minor and not fully depicted, like Gerhardt and the Jouberts. The comments on art and culture are largely impressions created from details of beautiful gardens, peaceful and orderly

salons in the midst of disaster, quiet dinners and discussions. That the French way of life was not so much real to Cather as part of her dream is indicated in a lecture she gave in 1921:

[The Frenchman] doesn't talk nonsense about art, about self-expression; he is too greatly occupied with building the things that make his home. His house, his gardens, his vineyards, these are the things that fill his mind. He creates something beautiful, something lasting. . . . When a French painter wants to paint a picture, he makes a copy of a garden, a home, a village. . . . Restlessness such as ours, success such as ours, do not make for beauty. Other things must come first; good cookery, cottages that are homes, not playthings; gardens, repose. These are first-rate things, and out of first rate stuff art is made.⁶¹

In One of Ours, the culture which she preserves in France is the culture of cooking, of homes, of gardens and repose. For in the novel there is no other art except Gerhardt's music, which has been killed by the war, and the art of the Church mentioned only once.

This concept of civilized living is first suggested to Claude by Victor Morse. While Victor is not a spokesman for Cather's point-of-view, he makes a contrast undoubtedly Cather's, the contrast between Nebraska and France which he employs to describe his mistress Maisie:

Women like her simply don't exist in your part of the world. . . . She's a linguist and musician and all that. With her, every-day living is a fine art. Life, as she says, is what one makes it. In itself it's nothing. . . . In that part of France that's all shot to pieces, you'll find more life going on in the cellars than in your home-town, wherever that is. I'd rather be a stevedore in the London docks than a banker-king in one of your prairie states. (307-8)

The secondary French characters and settings bear out this interpretation of "life". The people are less important than what they represent. They are not highly individual nor detailed; they are part of the French setting of gardens, homes and repose.

It is through David Gerhardt that Claude meets his first French

family, the Jouberts. Mrs. Joubert suggests Mrs. Fields as well as Mrs. Ehrlich. Although she is about fifty with gray hair, she appears young with eyes quiet, smiling and intelligent, and pink cheeks, seeming to Claude rather like "a New England woman,--like the photographs of his mother's cousins" (348). Yet her face is sad with "an old, quiet, impersonal sadness,--sweet in its expression, like the sadness of music" (349). Although the house is very different from Mrs. Field's salon, it has an air of charm and grace, of "a house that was cared for by women" (350). The linen is clean and scented with lavender, the garden well-tended by M. Joubert. Dinner is served in the garden under the trees, and drops of rain fall on the tablecloth while the cat dozes in the sewing-chair and the pigeons catch worms in the sand beside them (355). Here Claude finds "perfect bliss"; "To be so warm, so dry, so clean, so beloved!" and sums up his content: "this beautiful land, this beautiful people, this beautiful omelette" (403-4).

Another of these "beautiful people" is Mademoiselle de Courcy at the Red Cross Unit, described by the Major as "a perfect lady" (379); while he means this in a limited sense, it nevertheless expresses Cather's central impression of her, an impression not further amplified by detail. Here the house and gardens, despite difficulties, still reveal beauty and order in contrast to the destruction around: "even though it was in ruins, it seemed so beautiful after the disorder of the world below" (382). The garden walks are cleanly gravelled, the low trees and shrubs still growing and a pear vine still bearing fruit. The living room too represents order and beauty

despite the circumstances:

There were coloured war posters on the clean board walls, brass shell-cases full of wild flowers and garden flowers, canvas camp-chairs, a shelf of books, a table covered by a white silk shawl embroidered with big butterflies. The sunlight on the floor, the bunches of fresh flowers, the white window curtains stirring in the breeze, reminded Claude of something. (385)

The whole atmosphere, "the odor of cleanness, and the indefinable air of personality" (385) appeals to him. And in talking to Mlle. de Courcy he comes to understand something of life: "a new kind of happiness, a new kind of sadness. Ruin and new birth; the shudder of ugly things in the past, the trembling image of beautiful ones on the horizon; finding and losing; that was life, he saw" (391). And here he "left something on the hilltop he would never find again"--his innocence (392).

Mademoiselle Claire and her little brother Lucien represent the height of this French art of repose, culture and beauty. Their house too is surrounded by gardens which they have kept up "in spite of everything" (412). Autumn flowers bloom in the garden under the old linden trees, encircled by gravel walks, and small white roses still remain in the rose garden. A fountain falls into a lily-pool on one side, and a tennis court on the other (412-3). Here "music has always been like a religion" (418), and although it is temporarily drowned out by the pulse of the guns, it will return. David plays on the violin the "suppressed, bitter melody" of the Saint-Saens concerto, the last thing that the son René had played there before he was killed, and Lucien who preserves the violin will come to play it some day in the future (416-8). And Claude goes to sleep, happy

that "men could still die for an idea", the ideals of culture and music and art. It is here that Claude comes to recognize "I never knew there was anything worth living for, till this war came on" (419).

The central figure of Book V is an American violinist, David Gerhardt, a character whom Daiches calls "a not very convincing symbol of that combination of American ideals and European culture which is what Claude has been searching for" (54). The character in the novel is only partially realized, and presented only briefly. We are told early there is "something out of the ordinary about him" which even the self-important Owens recognizes (370), that he has given up a promising career as a talented young violinist to enlist with the other young men in the war (407), that his violin was destroyed in a car accident, symbolic of the destruction of beauty by the modern world:--"I've seen so many beautiful old things smashed. . . I've become a fatalist" (409)⁶¹--that he speaks cynically of the ideals of the war yet he is nonetheless a romantic: "I've sometimes wondered whether the young men of our time had to die to bring a new idea into the world. . . something Olympian" (409).

Although David Gerhardt is a symbol of the artist destroyed by the war, he remains largely a symbol, and his character is not developed or made real in the novel. He is based upon a young violinist, David Hochstein, whom Cather had met several times and who was killed at the Argonne in 1918 under similar circumstances to those of the novel. Brown describes him as a young man of "poetic insight and a mixture of reticence and sincerity"⁶² and Sergeant quotes much of Cather's interview on Hochstein for the New York Herald in 1922:

I think that character must have been done from David Hochstein. It's not a portrait, it's not even an impressionistic sketch of him! . . . He was the sort of person to whom you gave your whole attention. . . . I felt that he was a very poetic violinist and that he had the stimmung of that particular composition [Schubert's Die Forelle].⁶⁴

Here she describes his hair as auburn, his eyes as "the yellow-brown of trout streams in sunlight", his face and head as "distinctly intellectual".⁶⁵ The account of his views and of the changes in him as a result of the war, she took from three conversations and from letters to his mother. She explains why she introduces him in Book V:

When I came to that part of the story, it was the figure of Hochstein, whom I had known so little, that walked into my study and stood beside my desk. I had not known him well, but neither would Claude Wheeler know him very well; the farmer boy hadn't the background, the sophistication to get very far with a man like Hochstein. But there was a common ground on which they could know and respect each the other--the ground on which Hochstein had met and admired his fellow soldiers at Camp Upton. And Claude would sense the other side of David and respect it.⁶⁶

The resultant character is, as Sergeant comments, "pale and insubstantial . . . recognizable as Hochstein but not 'created' even as a secondary character".⁶⁷ What Cather intended Gerhardt to signify is clear; but she failed to do this in fictional form. He represents an ideal but an ideal which cannot be translated into human terms. And thus he remains as a visionary embodiment of the true American, the American whom Claude would like to become, the artist achieved. He is the answer to Claude's quest:

In the years when he went to school in Lincoln, he was always hunting for some one whom he could admire, without reservations; some one he could envy, emulate, wish to be. Now he believed that even then he must have had some faint image of a man like Gerhardt in his mind. It was only in wartime that their paths would have been likely to cross. (411)

For him and the America he represents, Claude dies, as a hostage to God for David's safety (450). It is Cather's irony that reveals that David, like his art, has died before this sacrifice.

Despite the choice of France as a centre of art, there is surprisingly little treatment of religious art in this middle novel. Only one passage anticipates the concern with Catholic art and ritual which will dominate her later novels. Claude, entering the Church of St. Ouen, watches the few women kneeling, the lighted tapers forming pin-points of light in the darkness, and the pillars, "slender white columns in long rows, like the stems of silver poplars" (342). And he associates the colours of the window, the striking bell, with the timeless in nature and art, his past and the past of humanity:

[He] saw far behind him, the rose window, with its purple heart. As he stood staring, hat in hand, as still as the stone figures in the chapels, a great bell, up aloft, began to strike the hour in its deep, melodious throat; eleven beats, measured and far apart, as rich as the colours in the window, then silence. . . only in his memory the throbbing of an undreamed-of quality of sound. The revelations of the glass and bell had come almost simultaneously, as if one produced the other; and both were superlatives toward which his mind had always been groping,--or so it seemed to him then. . . . [Like] the stars whose light travels through space for hundreds of years before it reaches the earth and the human eye. The purple and crimson and peacock-green of this window had been shining quite as long as that before got to him. . . . He felt distinctly that it went through him and farther still. . . as if his mother were looking over his shoulder. (342-3)

This passage is the only explicit treatment of art in the novel. Although Gerhardt and René have been violinists, Gerhardt plays for us only once and René is dead. Wilhelmina Schroeder-Schatz sings but Cather is uninterested in her quality, only in her comments on Claude. Even Gladys is only a flat symbol. Instead of realized art,

there are only implications of art and its importance. Of all Cather's novels, this is the most vehement denunciation of a society that can no longer create, and the weakest evocation of a society which has created some of the greatest of man's works of art. The failure of art must lie beyond Nebraska itself, beyond the war; it must lie within Willa Cather.

Man and Religion: "something splendid about life" (103)

If we define religion in a narrow sense, it is clear that One of Ours treats religion in a more negative manner than even The Song of the Lark, and gives no real indication that within three years, Cather will turn in My Mortal Enemy to religion as a centre of meaning and stability in the modern world. Yet there is an indefinable sense in One of Ours of religious expectation and dedication, something rather different from Thea Kronberg's dedication to art. For in the war and France, Claude finds the meaning in life which belongs to religion, the sense that life has an end and a purpose, an answer to the question he used to ask in summer evenings by the windmill "what to do with his life?" (284). It provides an ideal to which Claude can cling: "Life was so short that it meant nothing unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured; unless the shadows of individual existence came and went against a background that held together" (406). While this dream is clearly connected with the culture and art of France, and the renewed vitality of its land, nevertheless it suggests the illusory nature of the thing which Claude, and Cather herself, is here seeking, a nature which can really be

explained only by some form of religious faith.

In The Song of the Lark and O Pioneers!, Cather counters the negativism of the Protestant church, its sterility and asceticism, with a rich treatment of Catholicism. In One of Ours, the Catholic Church is submerged, although the equation of France as the cultural capitol of the world is linked with its Catholic heritage, as we are made aware in other writings of Cather. The Jouberts and the de Courcys are likely Catholic, but the few explicit references to the church are references to its art form which has resisted invasion by German materialism. The symbol of its tenacity is the little statue of the Virgin at the central door of the Church, her arms empty and a little foot only against her robe: "Le bébé est cassé, mais il a protégé sa mère" (382). The Americans themselves suggest the invasion of France, even its "rape"; they pursue churches as they pursue Boches, unwilling that any should "escape" (327). Indeed this invasion is similar in its destructive effect to that of the Germans: "The first [the Germans] destroyed material possessions, and this threatened everybody's integrity" (327). Claude's only exposure to religious art is at the Church in Rouen where he relates its windows, its bells, to the timeless in human experience (342-3).

Certainly the treatment of traditional religion is more bitter and acrid than anything before. It is represented largely by the denominational college to which Claude is sent in Lincoln, and by the sterile asceticism of Brother Weldon, the Chapins and Enid herself. Claude's whole rejection of the Church is based on his rejection of Temple college and its demand for "conversion":

[Before he was eighteen] he felt condemned, but he did not want to renounce a world he as yet knew nothing of. He would like to go into life with all his vigour, with all his faculties free. He didn't want to be like the young men who said in prayer-meeting that they leaned on their Saviour. He hated their way of meekly accepting permitted pleasures. . . . If anything could cure an intelligent boy of morbid religious fears, it was a denominational school like that to which Claude had been sent. Now he dismissed all Christian theology as something too full of evasions and sophistries to be reasoned about. The men who made it, he felt sure, were like the men who taught it. The noblest could be damned, according to their theory, while almost any mean-spirited parasite could be saved by faith. "Faith", as he saw it exemplified in the faculty of the Temple school, was a substitute for most of the manly qualities he admired. Young men went into the ministry because they were timid or lazy and wanted society to take care of them; because they wanted to be pampered by kind, trusting women like his mother. (50)

The examples of ministers in the novel certainly bear out the statement that they are weak, self-indulgent and shallow. The professors at the college, Claude says, are "just preachers who couldn't make a living at preaching" and the students, boys who fail at the State university (24). And the omniscient author verifies his viewpoint. Edward Chapin a student for the ministry, with an "old wasted face" at twenty-six, practises elocution and oratory with his "hoarse, overstrained voice" and is both studious and dull: "His natural stupidity must have been something quite out of the ordinary; after years of reverential study, he could not read the Greek testament without a lexicon and grammar at his elbow" (32). His sister Annabelle is "a gushing, silly girl, who found almost everything in their grubby life too good to be true. . . [and who could] make the finest things seem tame and flat merely by alluding to them" (32-3). The portrait of Brother Weldon is even more acid. Claude describes him as one of those "little pin-headed preachers" (24), an unctuous little

man with "his top-shaped head hung a little to one side, the thin hair . . . parted precisely over his high forehead and brushed in little ripples" (30). He is "soft-spoken and apologetic in manner", takes up "as little room as possible", and at dinner appears at the table "to ask a blessing upon the food and to sit with devout, downcast eyes while the chicken was being dismembered" (30), although later Claude after his marriage eats well when Brother Weldon is visiting:--"Preachers won't be fed on calories" as Leonard's wife comments (205). It is he who is influential in having Claude sent to Temple college and later he resolves Enid's doubts about marrying an "unsaved man": "the most important service devout girls could perform for the church was to bring promising young men to its support" (180). He has then an important hand in Claude's fate; as Claude observes, "the things and people he most disliked were the ones that were to shape his destiny" (31).

But the central symbol of the religious life in One of Ours is the ascetic Enid, the wife who shapes Claude's destiny and who finally allows his escape through her dedication to her sister and the missions of China. Certain of her qualities are shared with Claude's mother, her absolute faith in the Church and in its "chosen" ministers, her wish that Claude should be "saved", her naivety and ignorance of real life, but while Mrs. Wheeler despite these qualities provides the strength and endurance in Claude's nature, Enid represents the sterility and cold aloofness which almost destroys him. Typically, Cather presents this in terms of food. Like her mother, Enid is a vegetarian and goes to a sanatorium every

summer to eat nuts and toasted cereals. In Mrs. Royce's household "there was never during the day a meal that a man could look forward to with pleasure, or sit down to with satisfaction" (122), although she has a reputation locally for her angel-food cake and her mayonnaise dressing. Similarly Enid feeds Claude adequately only when Brother Weldon comes to visit, and frequently leaves him a cold supper in the icebox while out at a meeting of the Anti-Saloon League: canned salmon, hard-boiled eggs, lettuce, tomatoes and cold rice pudding (201). This asceticism is clearly related to sex. She keeps the rooster shut away from the hens as unfertilized eggs keep better and Leonard Dawson comments to his wife:

"I can't stand that damned wife of Claude's! . . . She went to town all right, and he's over there eating a cold supper by himself. That woman's a fanatic. She ain't content with practising prohibition on humankind; she's begun now on the hens." (203-4)

The cold supper, the religious fanaticism, the prohibition literature and the production of eggs are all related, to Cather as to Dawson. More explicitly, on the night of their honeymoon, Claude is left to sit up in the dirty smoking-car, littered with dust, newspapers and cigar smoke, and this coldness is not the passing shyness of a new bride but a permanent feature of Enid:

Everything about a man's embrace was repugnant to Enid; something inflicted upon women, like the pain of childbirth,--for Eve's transgressions, perhaps. This repugnance was more than physical; she disliked ardour of any kind, even religious ardour. She had been fonder of Claude before she married him than she was now. (210)

Her body is graceful, light, gentle, yet she has no feelings to match these, and she is able to "make his life hideous to him without ever knowing it" (211). She is well suited to Bayliss, the cold business-

man who enjoys her vegetarian suppers and her dedication to "our literature" for the prohibition campaign, which he supports not for religious reasons so much as for social ones: "He hated it less for the harm it did than for the pleasure it gave" (211).

Yet the old minister Mr. Smith used to find in little Enid Royce "the promise of virtuous and comely Christian womanhood" (144) and she rightly goes off to the missions of China for which she says "I have always been keeping myself free. . . . It seems as if a finger were pointing me over there. . . . Until I take that road, Christ withholds himself" (131-2). There her coldness and asceticism will be appropriate and she will be happier, as Claude says "among all those preachers, with their smooth talk and make-believe" (222).

Even Claude's mother, Mrs. Wheeler, has a firm and traditional faith which Claude finds naive and sheltered but from which he cannot dissuade her. She is not interested in new things or people "unless they in some way had to do with the church", and she hopes earnestly for Claude that he will feel the "need of coming closer to the church": "She had told him once or twice that nothing could happen in the world which would give her so much pleasure as to see him reconciled to Christ" (49). Her views too are narrow. She fears that the State professors "are not Christian men", that the fraternities are "places where boys learn all sorts of evil" and that "dreadful things go on in them sometimes", that the students are too interested in "athletics and frivolity" (24-5):

His mother was old-fashioned. She thought dancing and card-playing dangerous pastimes--only rough people did such things. . . and

"worldiness" only another word for wickedness. According to her conception of education, one should learn, not think; and above all, one must not enquire. The history of the human race, as it lay behind one, was already explained; and so was its destiny, which lay before. The mind should remain obediently within the theological concept of history. (25)

In this way, she is a suitable mother for Bayliss who chides her for having a second cup of coffee. Even her opinion of Paris is narrow; to her it was "the wickedest of cities, the capitol of a frivolous, wine-drinking, Catholic people, who were responsible for the massacre of St. Bartholemew and for the grinning atheist Voltaire" (172). Yet when she learns that the women are praying for it all day long in the Churches, she concedes that "there must be many God-fearing people there" and that "God has preserved it all these years" and will hear these prayers (170). And her faith, though naive, is devout and sincere; she has the true Christian attributes of patience, endurance and love.

Claude himself in many ways is religious, although he is basically a humanist. He believes himself to be a Christian, for "he believed in God, and in the spirit of the four Gospels, and in the Sermon on the Mount" (50). In his childhood he asserts that God will revenge his father's destruction of the cherry tree: "God would surely punish a man who could do that" (28). He concedes that Christ is both great and good, although he claims that Christ was not the traditional "Christian"; meek and passive: "the Jews were honest when they thought him the most dangerous kind of criminal" (86). Yet he prefers the first Books of Paradise Lost as "much more interesting than the books about perfect innocence in Eden" and says "if you

took all the great sinners out of the Bible, you'd take out all the interesting characters" (86).

He deserves Enid for his romanticism concerning women, as he later realizes:

Flowers and foreign missions--her garden and the great kingdom of China; there was something unusual and touching about her pre-occupations. Something quite charming, too. Women ought to be religious; faith was the natural fragrance of their minds. The more incredible the things they believed, the more lovely was the act of belief. . . . A woman who didn't have holy thoughts about mysterious things far away would be prosaic and commonplace, like a man. (127)

In his disillusionment with love, marriage, and the sterile society behind it, Claude turns to another form of faith to discover the meaning of life. And he finds this in war, something to which he can dedicate his life, the salvation of his own home. In Lincoln he had come to believe that the martyrs must have found "something splendid about life" too, something "outside themselves. Otherwise they would have made themselves comfortable with little things" (53), and he identifies himself particularly with Joan of Arc who becomes for him a "living figure in his mind. . . . About her figure there gathered a luminous cloud, like dust, with soldiers in it. . . the banner with lilies. . . a great church. . . cities with walls" (62),

His own "mission" Claude finds in France, which provides the "something splendid", the heroism he demands of life: "Life had after all turned out well for him, and everything had a noble significance" (411). His idealism he explains to David Gerhardt:

No battlefield or shattered country he had seen was as ugly as this world would be if men like his brother Bayliss controlled it altogether. Until the war broke out, he had supposed they did control it. . . . But the event had shown that there were a

great many people left who cared about something else. . . . The sound of the guns had from the first been pleasant to him, had given him a feeling of confidence and safety; tonight he knew why. What they said was, that men could still die for an idea; and would burn all they had made to keep their dreams. He knew the future of the world was safe. . . . Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men. As long as that was true, and now he knew it was true--he had come all this way to find out--he had no quarrel with Destiny. (419-20)

His belief is partially undercut by Gerhardt's comments that war is "a costly way of providing adventure for the young" (419) and that "The war was put up to our generation. I don't know what for; the sins of our fathers, probably. Certainly not to make the world safe for Democracy, or any rhetoric of that sort" (409). But David too is basically a romantic idealist and expects as a result of the war some unseen and splendid outcome:

You remember in the old mythology tales how, when the sons of the gods were born, the mothers always died in agony? . . . I've sometimes wondered whether the young men of our time had to die to bring a new idea into the world. . . something Olympian. I'd like to know. I think I shall know. (409)⁶⁸

And he asserts his belief in immortality which he has come to apprehend "the same way I used to get things in art--knowing them and living on them before I understood them" (410). The war which makes a hero out of the flying ace Victor Morse, which "took a little fellow from a little town, gave him an air and a swagger, a life like a movie-film,--and then a death like the rebel angels" (375) also provides a heroic death for Claude Wheeler who sacrifices himself with his men for France and his ideals: "They were mortal, but they were unconquerable" (453).

As the war brings to Claude "Sunrise on the Prairie"(Book III,

its termination brings sunset to America and to Lovely Creek (455, 457). Claude himself is compared to "the evening sun on the horizon" for "the thought of him is always there, beyond everything else, at the farthest edge of consciousness" (457). Yet the novel ends in conventional religious affirmation. Claude is "safe, safe"; he will bear no disillusion, for as Mrs. Wheeler feels: "God had saved him from some horrible suffering, some horrible end" (458) and Mahailey affirms: "Never you mind, Mudder, you'll see your boy up yonder" which she believes to be "not so very far above the kitchen stove" (459).

Nevertheless, Claude dies ironically as a victim of illusion which is preserved at the expense of fact. He had bargained with God for the life of David and is denied, although he never learns this:

He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can ever be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision and to see no more. She would have dreaded the awakening. (458)

As the professor says in his lecture on mediaeval Catholicism: "That's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives" (68b).

One of Ours ends then in a Requiem for art and the artist like The Professor's House. Cather's belief that the world broke in two is translated into art, albeit an unsatisfactory art. Sergeant observed that the statement seemed paradoxical, for in 1922 "Willa was full of creative ardour, very well, very productive, and steadily gaining in literary reputation".⁶⁹ Yet when the novel was published, it is Sergeant who finds it "out of key. . . middle-aged, cold-hearted,

almost querulous".⁷⁰ She recognized that something in Cather had died, something connected with her youth and the essence of her creative powers. It is not only her thesis which makes the novel one of Cather's weakest. It is something in the concept of art itself. And it prepares the way for The Professor's House and the denial of art as a way of life in the modern world.

9. A LOST LADY: "the sunset of the pioneer" (168)¹

Following closely on One of Ours, A Lost Lady is, in many respects, a thesis novel which has evolved as a reaction to Cather's firm belief ^{that} "the world broke in two in 1922".² In his The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, John Randall observes that Cather's central problem in A Lost Lady as in One of Ours, The Professor's House and My Mortal Enemy concerns "how to live the comely life in the modern world".³ In actuality, Cather here records the loss of the comely life in America and the replacement of the salon with the garage, the forest with the match factory. In The Song of the Lark, an established culture still lay for Cather in the future of America; as Doctor Archie says, "Why don't those old fellows [like Wunsch] stay at home? We won't need them for another hundred years".⁴ Now in 1923, the art of the comely life is doomed with the "sunset of the pioneer". It lies only in the past, and A Lost Lady, like My Ántonia, is a nostalgic recreation of an era which can be preserved from decay only in art. As Elizabeth Sergeant comments in Fire Under the Andes, A Lost Lady is "a novel whose disillusionments are full of illusions".⁵

At the centre of the novelette is Marian Forrester herself and the work is designed to convey, as Sergeant perceptively notes, her "perfume, her place as an objet d' art in the middle of her story".⁶ But as we see Ántonia only through the eyes of Jim, so we see Marian through the eyes of Neil Herbert, and the novel really concerns a relationship and the reflection of a personality through

art. Although Neil does not tell his own story like Jim, he is in effect a third-person narrator, and our knowledge of Marian Forrester is filtered almost entirely, with the exception of two incidents, through his consciousness. Cather had considerable difficulty in this. After writing one third of the book, she was dissatisfied with the balance between Neil as narrator and direct observation; she revised several chapters with Neil as direct narrator, eventually rejecting this for her first choice.⁷ This raises the problem suggested by Van Ghent; do we see "the fatality of Marian Forrester's nature and corrosion overtaking it" or "only the corruption of an image in Neil's mind?"⁸ Curtin observes that the point of the novel is not to show the mind of Neil but the loss of Mrs. Forrester, that Cather adopts this point of view to avoid identification with Neil's idealism, his nostalgia for the lost west:

He could not tell the story because he does not see that things are ephemeral, that circumstances change. Though she [Cather] may have regretted its passing as much as Neil, she was realistic enough to know it must be accepted.⁹

Yet Cather clearly does not accept change, as indicated not only here but in One of Ours, and My Mortal Enemy as well as in Not Under Forty, Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock and "The Old Beauty". In the end, as Chamillard suggests, the importance of the title is significant: "plus que la roman de la dame perdue, c'est le roman de celui qui a perdu sa dame, et qui, au fond, y a peut-être gagné".¹⁰ She is not "lost" for Neil, since he is able to recreate her in memory, a memory which, like Jim Burden's, is "better than anything that can ever happen to one again".¹¹

The structure of the novelette is interesting and ^{it} is considered the most perfect of Cather's works. Kronenberger calls it "well-nigh perfect: one of the few distinguished novelettes written in America" (140)¹² and Lloyd Morris: "all but faultless in structure; it possesses evident beauty of design and proportion, and the form of the story seems only an inevitable expression of its content".¹³ The story is simple. Cather had said to Elizabeth Sergeant of My Ántonia: "I want my new heroine to be like this--like a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides. . . . I want her to stand out. . . because she is the story".¹⁴ This statement is truer of Marian Forrester who is at the centre of three societies and three orders of life. Although Neil is in effect the narrator, he represents the modern generation of art; he is ineffectual and unable to control the outcome, and he watches the deterioration of art in modern America. The real conflict of the novel is the replacement of Captain Forrester, and the old generation of pioneer values, by Ivy Peters and the modern commercial society, not only as the financial and cultural centre of life but even as the possessor of Marian Forrester.¹⁵ This conflict is represented largely through parallelism in the two parts of the story; the two dinner parties, the preservation and draining of the marshes, the "rescue" of Mrs. Forrester by the Captain, by Ivy and by the querulous Englishman, the attitude to sensuality. At the heart of the change is Neil's (and Cather's) belief in the old aristocratic order, as indicated by Marian's greeting in Part I of Cyrus Dalzell and in Part II of Ivy Peters: "It was one thing to greet the President of the Colorado and

Utah en déshabillé, but it was another thing to chatter with a coarse-grained fellow like Ivy Peters in her wrapper and slippers" (118-9). The novel then is divided into two parts, to reveal not so much the fall of Mrs. Forrester as the fall of the society which possesses her. Neil does not offer himself as Jim does not; he turns away from her in disgust because she has effectually rejected his idealism by preferring not death with the Captain but life with Ivy Peters. In a sense she has rejected him as well: "He had given her a year of his life, and she had thrown it away" (170).¹⁶

Like *Ántonia*, Marian Forrester is essentially passive, the symbol of culture as *Ántonia* is the symbol of the land and fertility. In some sense she is, as Chamaillard notes, "une grande artiste",¹⁷ yet she resembles Marie and *Ántonia*, rather than Thea, Cressida Garnet, Kitty Ayrshire or Don Hedger, the true artists, nor is she like the artistic reflectors Jim, Carl, Neil, the Archbishop or even Claude Herbert. Cather herself suggests this static quality when she explains:

The problem was to get her not like a standardized heroine in fiction, but as she really was, and not to care about anything in the story except that one character. And there is nothing but that portrait. Everything else is subordinate. . . . I didn't try to make a character study, but just a portrait like a thin miniature painted on ivory. . . . I wasn't interested in her character when I was little, but in her lovely hair and her laugh which made me happy clear down to my toes. . . . [I wanted to] get her just as I remembered her and produce the effect she had on me and the many others who knew her.¹⁸

This effect she achieves in her lost lady, an "artist of manners and personality" as Adams terms her.¹⁹ Cather's impression--"Wasn't she a flash of brightness in a grey background, that lady?"²⁰ is expressed

through Neil in the novel:

Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; of her eyes, lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little mocking. (35)

Her skin, Neil remembers, had "the fragrant, crystalline whiteness of white lilacs" (35) and her eyes promised "a wild delight that he has not found in life", a secret of "ever-blooming, ever-burning, ever-piercing joy" (171-2). Her laugh, soft and musical, "rose and descended like a suave scale" (34) and later Neil remarks "[if only] he could hear that long-lost lady laugh again, he could be gay" (71).²¹

Part of her charm is her interest in others: "she couldn't help being interested in people, even very commonplace people" (70) and even when she mocks them she is flattering for "she made them seem more individual and vivid than they were in their own person" (70-1). Yet much of her attraction is sensual, as implied in the description and action.²² She does not change in the novel; she reveals her flightiness in the story of the bull and the red parasol (13); she greets Cyrus Dalzell en déshabillé, and the laugh "impatient, indulging, teasing, eager" (86) which Neil hears when he finds her with Frank Ellinger is not really unlike the laugh he remembers. She is coquettish with the little boys at the picnic, as she is later with the same boys, now young men, at her dinner party. And when Ed Elliott meets her in Buenos Aires, although her hair is "blackier than I remembered it" and her face powdered and rouged, he recognizes her by her laugh. To Neil, the tragedy of Marian Forrester is that despite the alternation of circumstances, she remains the same.²³

It is the society around her which changes, as noted by Neil, who represents the impotent modern artist. Like Jim he fits himself for his mission, the preservation of the memory of Marian Forrester. While he will become an architect rather than a writer, he is gradually seeking an identity and finds it in the old aristocratic order. He peruses his uncle's library, filled with rows of matched classics brought West because "a gentleman had such books in his library, just as he had claret in his cellar" (80) and Neil chooses to read "Don Juan", Tom Jones, Wilhelm Meister, Montaigne and Ovid. Like Cather herself, he has little interest in philosophy: "He had no curiosity about what men had thought; but about what they had felt and lived" (81). And this past culture gives him a perspective into the present and the American West, the characters becoming for him "living creatures caught in the very behaviour of living" (81) as Jim sees the Hired Girls in Ovid, and Tom Outland, the Pueblo Caves as a backdrop for The Odyssey:

He was eavesdropping upon the past, being let into the great world that had plunged and glittered and sumptuously sinned long before little Western towns were dreamed of. Those rapt evenings beside the lamp gave him a long perspective, influenced his conception of the people about him, made him know just what he wished his own relations with these people to be. (81-2)

Again the relationship is asexual, for Neil like Jim is an example of what Edmund Wilson calls "those limpid and sensitive young men to whom she [Cather] has always been addicted".²⁴ While Marian Forrester's charm for him is basically sensual, he evades this realization.²⁵ He avidly reads "Don Juan" and Tom Jones and he is fascinated by her contradictions, her mocking of the proprieties, the

gay life which she led in Colorado and the young men she has kept dangling. He has known too that she met the Captain in the mountains where her father has sent her after her fiancé had been murdered by the husband of another woman, so that scandal has always surrounded her. Yet when Neil is faced with her real relationship to Frank Ellinger, he finds not only his ideals lost but even the purity of nature stained: "He had lost one of the most beautiful things in his life. Before the dew dried, the morning had been wrecked for him; and all subsequent mornings" (86). And symbolically he throws his roses into the mud: "Lilies that fester smell ^{her} worse than weeds".²⁶ Although he persuades himself "it was not a moral scruple she outraged, but an aesthetic ideal" (87), the admission that her beauty has been contaminated by a secret coarseness suggests that he is evading the truth. He is able, too, to block out her ending, her marriage to a husband, stingy and quarrelsome, her face "a good deal made up", her hair blacker than ever (173), and claims that she has been "well cared for, to the very end" (174). Yet he preserves this memory at a sacrifice; like Mr. Ogden he will not see Mrs. Forrester in later life for "the fear of losing a pleasant memory, of finding her changed and marred, a dread of something that would throw a disenchanting light upon the past" (152). In this way he is able to retain of her "a bright, impersonal memory" (171).

Thus Neil effectually removes himself from the action, as Jim does in the fourth Book of *My Ántonia*, and he observes as a spectator, the tragedy which centres in Marian, the replacement of the Captain by Ivy, of the old aristocrats of nature *by* the new unscrupulous

men of business. The two are contrasted throughout the novel in their attitudes to nature, to business, to culture, and to Marian.

Although Neil does not appreciate this till later, it is actually Marian's relationship to the Captain, rather than his to her, which is significant. Neil is first attracted to her because of her choice of the Captain over the gay young men of Colorado, her "comprehension of a man like the railroad builder, her loyalty to him" which gives her "quality; something that could never become worn or shabby" (78-9). And the Captain's illness seems at the time to be "a care that drained her and dimmed her and kept her from being all that she might be" (152). It is only after his death that Neil realizes that he has been her source of stability, that "it was the Captain who seemed the reality" (170) and without him "She was flighty and perverse. She seemed to have lost her faculty of discrimination; her power of easily and graciously keeping everyone in his proper place" (152-3).

To Neil, the Captain symbolizes the heroic pioneers. In his youth he came west to drive supplies from Nebraska across the plains to Denver, and he tells stories of these old days:

The freighters, after embarking in that sea of grass six hundred miles in width, lost all count of the days of the week and the month. One day was like another, and all were glorious; good hunting, plenty of antelope and buffalo, boundless sunny sky, boundless plains of waving grass, long, fresh-water lagoons yellow with lagoon flowers, where the bison in their periodic migrations stopped to drink and bathe and wallow. "An ideal life for a young man", the Captain pronounced. (52)

On one of these drives, the Captain discovered Sweet Water, an Indian encampment on the hill, and his dream to return here to settle, to build an orchard and a garden, becomes symbolic of the

dream which has settled the American west:

All our great West has been developed from such dreams; the homesteader's, and the prospector's and the contractor's. We dreamed the railroads across the mountains, just as I dreamed my place on the Sweet Water. All these things will be everyday facts to the coming generation, but to us--. (55)

And his death comes to symbolize the end of an era of the pioneers, the natural aristocrats, and the beginning of an age of change and instability:

The people, the very country itself, were changing so fast that there would be nothing to come back to. He had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer. He had come upon it when already its glory was nearly spent. So in the buffalo times a traveller used to come upon the embers of a hunter's fire on the prairie, after the hunter was up and gone; the coals would be trampled out, but the ground was warm, and the flattened grass where his pony had grazed, told the story.

This was the very end of the road-making West; the men who had put plains and mountains under the iron harness were old; some were poor, and even the successful ones were hunting for rest and a brief reprieve from death. It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back. The taste and smell and song of it, the visions those men had seen in the air and followed,--these he had caught in a kind of afterglow in their own faces,--and this would always be his. (168-9)²⁷

The Captain's relationship to Nature is indicated clearly, in his closeness to his garden and his roses where he spends his last days watching the sun dial count off the last hours of the West. He has the qualities of the man of nature. His physical strength, his courage and dependability are indicated in his rescue of Marian from Eagle Cliff where she has broken a leg and her companion been killed. He carries her over "all the most dangerous places on the trail" (165) and she remarks "I knew that if we fell, we'd go together: he would never drop me" (165-6). He possesses too individuality, dignity, calmness and the ability to control others: "His repose was like that

of a mountain. When he laid his fleshy, thick-fingered hand upon a frantic horse, an hysterical woman, an Irish workman out for blood, he brought them peace" (48-9). And his accidental fall seems to Mrs. Forrester "as if one of the mountains had fallen down" (41).

The attitude of his era to nature is symbolized in the novel by the Captain's preservation of the marsh which Ivy Peters drains for wheatlands. These meadows, where Neil and his friends picnic at the beginning of the novel, are shaded by cottonwoods and flowering with wild roses, blue-eyed grass, and silvery milk-weed. A sanctuary for wild life, they become to Neil a symbol of the wild land, pure and unstained by human society:

The sky was burning with the soft pink and silver of a cloudless summer dawn. The heavy, bowed grasses splashed him to the knees. All over the marsh, snow-on-the-mountain, globed with dew, made cool sheets of silver, and the swamp milk-weed spread its flat, raspberry-coloured clusters. There was an almost religious purity about the fresh morning air, the tender sky, the grass and flowers with the sheen of early dew upon them. There was in all living things something limpid and joyous--like the wet, morning call of the birds, flying up through the unstained atmosphere. Out of the saffron east a thin, yellow, wine-like sunshine began to gild the fragrant meadows and the glistening tops of the grove. Neil wondered why he did not often come over like this, to see the day before men and their activities had spoiled it, while the morning was still unsullied, like a gift handed down from heroic ages. (84-5)*

Only Ivy Peters profanes this sanctuary, shooting the ducks at sundown in rebellion against the decrees of an aristocratic order: "I can make off across the cornfields before the old Cap sees me. He's not much on the run" (22). And he defeats the Captain who is left to sit in his garden, "watching the sunset glory on his roses" (114) and marking

*

Italics mine.

off on his old sundial the last hours of the Old West (108), while Ivy Peters buys control of the world:

The Old West had been settled by dreamers, great-hearted adventurers who were unpractical to the point of magnificence; a courteous brotherhood, strong in attack, but weak in defense, who could conquer but could not hold. Now all the vast territory they had won was to be at the mercy of men like Ivy Peters, who had never dared anything, never risked anything. They would drink up the mirage, dispel the morning freshness, root out the great brooding spirit of freedom, the generous, easy life of the great land-holders. The space, the colour, the princely carelessness of the pioneer they would destroy and cut into profitable bits, as the match factory splinters the primeval forest. All the way from Missouri to the mountains, this generation of shrewd young men, trained to petty economies by hard times, would do exactly what Ivy Peters had done when he drained the Forrester marsh. (106-7)

Peters' interest in Nature is not so much commercialism as purposeless destruction. We learn early that he poisons the neighbourhood dogs, carries a gun into the Captain's sanctuary, and slits the woodpecker's eyes merely to observe her flying helplessly. He brags before Captain Forrester that he enjoys shooting along the creek "better than anywhere else" (105) and in draining the marshes he had "obliterated a few acres of something he hated, though he could not name it, and had asserted his power over the people who had loved these unproductive meadows for their idleness and silvery beauty" (106). The contrast between the two protagonists is physical as well as mental. Where the Captain is rugged and calm, like the mountains, Ivy is ugly, his face red and swollen as if by bee-stings or poison ivy, marked by freckles and two hard permanent dimples. His eyes are beady and narrow, lashless with "the fixed, unblinking hardness of a snake's" (21) a description which links him to Marian's fear of the blood-suckers and the watersnakes in Sweet Water (18)

and eventually to her fate. Thus he becomes the power of Evil in the Eden of the West, the snake who seduces and destroys through the love of Evil for its own sake.²⁸

The Captain and Ivy contrast in their business relations as well, and the "plot" of the novel, if it can be called one, is the replacement of the Captain by Ivy Peters as the financial and "cultural" centre of the community.²⁹ For the Captain has "a conscience that had never been juggled with" (48) and in the Bank failure of 1873, he pays back every one of the working-men who had deposited their meagre savings in his bank for a home, illness, or their son's education, taking all the losses on himself: "His name meant a hundred cents on the dollar" (92). At the time his wife acknowledges his honour in selling all the bonds and securities: "I wouldn't for the world have had him do otherwise for me. He would never hold up his head again. You see, I know him" (92-3). Yet later she admires Ivy Peters for his cleverness in business, boasting that he owns "half the town already" and has invested money for her in Wyoming land (123). Although she comments "I don't admire people who cheat Indians. Indeed I don't", she adds that while rascality may not be the only business method "It succeeds faster than anything else" (124). And when the Judge protests concerning her business dealings, she replies to Neil: "The Judge is like Mr. Forrester; his methods don't work nowadays. He will never get us out of debt, dear man!" (123). Thus Ivy takes over the position of Captain Forrester, sitting on the porch of his house and feared by the youth of the town as they had feared and obeyed the Captain: "They all laughed

at Ivy. No Matter what he did or said, they laughed,--in recognition of his general success" (159). And the Judge congratulates Neil for his choice of architecture instead of law: "I can't see any honourable career for a lawyer, in this new business world that's coming up. Leave the law to boys like Ivy Peters" (93).

But the real contrast between Ivy Peters and Captain Forrester is cultural, for the latter is a natural aristocrat, the former a crude young business man.³⁰ This contrast is accentuated through the parallel of the two dinner-parties, the first where the Captain toasts his wife "with gravity and courage" (51) and carves the dinner, passing the plates to all with generosity and kindness, and the second where Marian Forrester exerts herself to provide culture for the boys of Sweet Water:

I'm finding new friends among the young men. . . . I hate to see them growing up like savages, when all they need is a civilized house to come to, and a woman to give them a few hints. They've never had a chance. (155)

Even these boys contrast advantageously with Ivy Peters whose level of culture is indicated by his "farm-hand guffaw" when telling an improper story (119). He believes in democracy and denies the existence of a social order which he calls "a fortunate and privileged class". He treats Mrs. Forrester as if she were an equal: "I'm just as good as she is" (20) and comments on Forrester's "delusion of grandeur": "He's happier now that he's like the rest of us and don't have to change his shirt every day" (105). In contrast to the Captain's concern for jewels, which he bought for his wife to acknowledge "things he could not gracefully utter" (51), Ivy is parsimonious and wears the same

coat which he bought on graduation from highschool. And he has no concern for noblesse oblige. As young Adolf Blum says, "If everybody ate round steak like Ivy Peter's family, there would be nothing in the butcher's trade" (21).

The dinner-party episode deliberately parallels the dinner-party which Mrs. Forrester gives early in the novel.³¹ The element of nostalgia is accentuated; Mrs. Forrester comments at the dinner that she does not expect Neil to carve like the Captain: "Nobody can carve now as men used to" (160). She sets the table with silver dishes, candlesticks, flowers and her best china but Neil observes acidly:

The young men who sat about in the twilight would not know the difference, he thought, if she had furnished her table that morning from the stock in Wernz's queensware store. Their conception of a really fine dinner service was one "hand painted" by a sister or sweetheart. (159)

The boys are unable to converse gracefully while the duck is eaten, except to ask Mrs. Forrester if she would "care for the jelly" (161) and she is unable to eat herself, "using up all her vitality to electrify these heavy lads into speech" (162). Neil notes that they are uninterested in conversation but "wanted more duck, and to be let alone with it" (162). Neil's final judgement of their cultural deficiencies is damning: "Why did she do it? How would she feel about it tonight, when she sank dead weary into bed, after these stupid boys had said good-night, and their yellow shoes had carried them down the hill?" (162).

The mothers and aunts of these young men reveal their cultural deficiencies too, when they gain entry to the house after the Captain

becomes helpless, and they swarm "like ants" where they have been denied for years to discover:

There was nothing remarkable about the place at all! The kitchen was inconvenient, the sink was smelly. The carpets were worn, the curtains faded, the clumsy, old-fashioned furniture they wouldn't have had for a gift, and the upstairs bed-rooms were full of dust and cobwebs. (138)

They rummage through the linen closets, count the wine, beer and whiskey glasses, the linen tablecloths "long enough to make two", and the tarnished silver platters and covered dishes, looking "so wide-awake, so important and pleased with themselves" and wondering why she did not sell all these things for money (138-9).

But Marian Forrester chooses this society, the New ~~over~~ the Old, *preferring* to live rather than to fade away and "immolate herself" upon the graves of her husband and the old pioneers. At first her relationship to Ivy Peters is a necessity: "We have to get along with Ivy Peters, we simply have to" (123) but gradually she becomes admiring, finally accepting him not only as her lawyer, but her lover.³² Neil's last view of her is standing in the kitchen baking, with Ivy Peters' arms across her breast. Yet she lives on in Neil's memory, and her culture has influenced his life: "He came to be very glad that he had known her, and that she had had a hand in breaking him to life" (171). He remembers her as he wishes her to be, rather than as she is: "She had always the power of suggesting things much *lovelier* than herself, as the perfume of a single flower may call up the whole sweetness of spring" (172). And he observes before the epilogue that he has not lost her after all, for "when he did not know if Daniel Forrester's widow were living or dead, she returned to him, a bright, impersonal

memory" (171). And he refuses at the end to violate this memory by a final glimpse of her.

The extremes of A Lost Lady are of course simplified, which gives the work not only its perfect structure and technique but its tone of a thesis-novel. The values of the Captain, his qualities and characteristics, are idealized beyond all reality and Geismar questions the real difference between Cyrus Dalzell and Ivy Peters:

A Lost Lady reflects a curious "sunset of the pioneers"--a prismatic sunset, an almost mythical pioneer. . . . [It is] a kind of touching fairy tale of the more beneficent Robber Barons, or their second and third cousins. It is a reflection not of a society but of a point of view that, increasingly narrow, selective and fanciful, is actually retreating further and further from society.³³

Nevertheless, the novel does successfully convey Cather's point of view in this period, whether this view is idealistic or real. The old values are no longer possible in the New Society, the old relationship to nature, business and culture; the new society is cheaper and without quality. For ideals can exist with charm only in the old aristocratic order, close to nature and pioneer values, with impeccable moral standards and high cultural ideals. While Marian Forrester lives on, as an objet d'art, painted and powdered, she reflects the cheapness of the society which no longer appreciates true art and prefers the false. Yet she is not lost, as *Ántonia* and *Nebraska* are not lost, for she exists as a memory in Neil's mind and the book preserves this memory in the form of art which is eternal and beyond time and the decay of society.³⁴

10. THE PROFESSOR'S HOUSE: "the world broke in two"¹

In The Professor's House Willa Cather reached a crisis in her

career as a novelist: to go on into the modern world, or to retreat into the past, safe and secure from the "noisy push of the present".² Here she faces squarely her dilemma, and the greatness of the novel lies in its record of this conflict between present and past, between society and the individual, ultimately between art and life. Godfrey St. Peter chooses the present and life, but not without a struggle and not without renouncing the past and art. He must live on "without joy", without the desire of the artist and the will to create and to shape the world to his own experience. Cather lives on as well; she does not renounce all art but she renounces the conflict which brings art into being, the constant changing of nature and society which challenges art to give it form. She chooses instead the static, the unchanging, the historical panorama and thus she, like Godfrey St. Peter, uses her art to evade the issues of life. Her world has broken in two.³

Like its predecessors A Lost Lady and One of Ours, The Professor's House records Cather's disillusionment with society in the twenties, its decay of values and their replacement by a new code of materialist "ethics". But it approaches this theme, not from the point of view of a lost lady or a Claude whose art is stillborn, but of the artist achieved, Godfrey St. Peter, professor of history and author of eight volumes on the Spanish explorations in America. Although Cather

adopts an omniscient point of view in Parts I and III, and although we see St. Peter from several angles rather than the one viewpoint common to Cather's fiction, the identification of St. Peter with Cather is close. He is perhaps more clearly Catherian than any other of her surrogates with the exception of Jim Burden, and Sergeant observes that he shares "some of Willa's own tastes, prejudices, passions".⁴ Thus with his renunciation of art, the destruction of modern society has reached the centre of Cather's world.

Although Cather herself claimed to Miss Sergeant while she was writing the novel that its theme was "the connection or opposition between youth and age, and the way they mutually stirred one another"⁵, we cannot take Cather's statements too seriously. The problem of the novel is not the connection between youth and age, or between Tom and the Professor as she implies, but the conflict between St. Peter and society, between the man that he has become and the man he believes himself to have been. Tom Outland is integral to this meaning, for he represents the ideal of the Professor, the man who combines both nature and art through his twin achievements, the discovery of the Mesa Verde and of the Outland vacuum principle. We have again a double protagonist, but while we see *Ántonia* through the eyes of Jim and Marian Forrester through the eyes of Neil, these characters seem to have an independent existence of their own. Tom however exists, not in the real world, but only through St. Peter's memory. There is no corrective for the Professor's view of him, and in the end, we may feel that Tom appears to the Professor, and to Cather herself, very much as he does to Scott McGregor: "Tom isn't very real to me any

more. Sometimes I think he was just a--a glittering idea" (111).

The subject of The Professor's House is not in itself revolutionary. As Hoffman points out in The Twenties, the novel is typical of the traditionalism of its decade. It represents the defeat of taste by fretful commercialism, and the dullness of "Puritan society". It involves an academic protagonist "dedicated to the moral truth and impatient to the point of exasperation with the easy and reckless formulations of the 'moderns'" and affirms an ideal human existence in relation to the land from which her favoured characters draw meaning and order for their life. Finally it withdraws after 1922 from the present into history in search of values and traditions denied by the modern age.⁶ Yet the vehemence of Cather's statement can be explained only by a personal crisis not completely recorded. James Schroeter suggests that during 1924, while she was writing the novel, she herself achieved the success which the Professor has achieved and likewise found it empty.⁷ More important, she also visited her friend Isabella McClung and her husband Jam Hambourg in Ville d'Avray, France, and attempted to work in the study which they provided for her, but although she found it charming, in attractive surroundings and convenient, she could not write, as the Professor cannot write in the study of his new home. Schroeter comments: "Clearly the visit that summer to Ville d'Avray must have provided Willa not only with her model for Marcellus [Jan himself who is commonly recognized as his prototype] but her symbolism of houses, rooms, and studies, and the emotional furniture she put into them".⁸

The novel is revolutionary however in technique, in the

intrusion of Book II "Tom Outland's story" into the Professor's present in a small Mid-West university town. Here as in One of Ours and A Lost Lady, Cather juxtaposes modern America with another civilization and culture. Schroeter connects this structure to the epigraph "a turquoise set in dull silver" and suggests that Book II is the turquoise, I and III the dull silver. The novel is "constructed like the Indian bracelet. . . to draw an ironic contrast not only between two pieces of jewellery but between two civilizations, between two epochs, and between the two men, Marcellus and Outland, who symbolize these differences".⁹ Cather herself intended the structure to resemble a sonata as she told Elizabeth Sergeant:

Her new book, she told me. . . was based on a musical form. Indeed, she said her unfinished opus had a sonata form, starting molto moderato. There were to be three parts, every one with Italian musical nomenclature. . . . My impression is that the middle book, Tom Outland's story, was to be molto appassionata.¹⁰

Later she suggested that Book II was similar to the open window in a Dutch painting of an interior which "let in the fresh air that blew off the Mesa".¹¹ It is however the musical analogy which has intrigued the critics, especially Giannone who has described Book I as the dramatic presentation of two themes "The novel's rhythm follows the characteristic development of the Sonata--statement, development, or fantasia, and restatement. . . . [It] corresponds to the organizing principle behind the sonata's dynamic growth" (153).¹²

Yet it is Giannone who voices the criticism of the novel: "Where Willa Cather finds it difficult to express the positive values at the centre of the novel through living persons or actual places, she is openly involved with form. Form becomes a value in itself. . .

[to compensate for] her seclusiveness and rejection of society and its values".¹³ The real problem of the novel is not this experimental technique which is effective in achieving its purposes¹⁴, but the tone of the whole. As Leon Edel points out, the Professor's wish to die is:"at no point sufficiently motivated by the facts of the small-town, the general hopelessness of the Philistine surroundings. To believe so intensely in art, and to have created so fully, and yet at the same time to be overpowered by a sense of futility and ineffectuality--these are the contradictions we discern."¹⁵ The Professor's House poses questions which it never answers.¹⁶ Cather reacted to this criticism adversely; in a note written on the copy she gave to Robert Frost, she wrote, "This is really a story of "'letting go with the heart' but most reviewers seem to consider it an attempt to popularize a system of philosophy".¹⁷ The philosophy, of course, is stoicism, acceptance and resignation, and although Cather does not intend to popularize it, it is clear that this is at the time, her personal solution.

For Cather as for the Professor, Tom Outland is essentially a part of the past which can never be recovered. His death in World War I marked the turning-point of society. As in My Ántonia and Alexandra's Bridge, the contrast of past and present is integrated into a single character, and here given a third relationship, to the national past of Spanish America. But the novel is more truly retrospective, for we feel that the past which the professor idealizes has never really existed.¹⁸ It is not more real than the present as in My Ántonia, nor is it simply a memory of youth, love and unfulfilled ideals as in

Alexandra's Bridge. For the Professor has fulfilled his ideals, completed his history. The past becomes a refuge in itself, no longer a source of nourishment or strength for the present but an escape, not only from society, but from life and even art. The Professor's absorption in the past leads directly to his suicide, in will if not in deed. And his return to society is not really a return at all. Miss Sergeant observes the similarity between the ending of the novel and Cather's comment in Art in her late essay, "Light on Adobe Walls":

Art is a concrete and personal and rather childish thing after all. . . . a game of make-believe, . . . too terribly human to be very "great", perhaps. Some very great artists have outgrown art, the men were bigger than the game.¹⁹

In "The Paradox of Success", Edel points out that "Balzac died with dozens of novels unwritten. Dostoevsky dropped his pen only when his physical strength failed him. Henry James' notebooks are crammed with tales he never had time to write, and he wrote ceaselessly," but for Willa Cather, "Success is never so interesting as struggle" as she says in the Preface to The Song of the Lark.²⁰ There is, in truth, no answer because the Professor's fate reflected her own personal disillusionment; as Brown points out it is "among the most revealing of her novels".²¹ Although Cather does not give up her art, she returns to the present world only in the weak Lucy Gayheart and the nostalgic tales of Obscure Destinies and The Old Beauty. In the past, safe and remote, events and people can be selected and controlled; this past, no longer personal but national, becomes for her an escape from the irresolvable dilemma of art in the modern world after 1922.

Man and Nature: "no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion" (251).

The relationship of man to nature is central to The Professor's House, as indicated in Cather's description of its form in terms of a Dutch painting, with its grey interior and its windows open to the grey eternal sea. The life of society, of the university, and in particular of St. Peter's family is purged by the Professor's relationship to Tom Outland and to the Mesa Verde:

I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American proprieties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies--until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behaviour.²²

The second section of the novel "Tom Outland" is intended as a key to the meaning of the whole, and this key centres in the Blue Mesa and the religious emotions which it inspires in both Tom and the Professor.

This closeness to nature is anticipated in Book I in the Professor's attitude to the lake, and to his garden, to nature uncontrolled, and to nature ordered by art. In his early life, the lake has already represented an escape from his dreary existence:

The great fact in life, the always possible escape from dullness, was the lake. The sun rose out of it, the day began there. . . . The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you. You had only to look at the lake, and you knew you would soon be free. . . ; it ran through the days like the weather, not a thing thought about, but a part of consciousness itself. (30)

The experience of "that sudden innocent blue" determines the Professor's life. When his family move to Kansas, he feels the deepest anguish of his life, an anguish comparable to "sinking for the third time" (31), and later he chooses Hamilton to teach at the time of his marriage because it is situated on Lake Michigan. The lake is related

to his creative powers: "The sight of it from his study window these many years had been of more assistance than all the convenient things he had done without" (31).

Already in Part I we are prepared for the Professor's return to nature as an evasion of the demands of society and family. In the middle of Mignon, St. Peter remarks to his wife: "It's been a mistake, our having a family and writing histories and getting middle-aged. We should have been picturesquely shipwrecked together when we were young" (94). But later he rejects even this relationship:

He found the very day, but his wife was not in it. Indeed nobody was in it but himself, and a weather-dried little sea captain from the Hautes-Pyrénées, half a dozen spry seamen, and a line of gleaming snow peaks, agonizingly high and sharp, along the southern coast of Spain. (95)

The lake provides a release for his energies. In September, finding himself exhausted by the new students, the long struggle to maintain academic standards, the September heat and his family, he sits in his study, his eyes closed, "resting his mind on the picture of intense autumn-blue water" (58). And in Part III he relinquishes life and action for passivity and absorption in the sun on the sand-pit, or the stars on the garden (263); he has returned to the cycle of life and reached again the beginnings:

He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water. Wherever sun sunned and rain rained and snow snowed, wherever life sprouted and decayed, places were alike to him. . . . Desire under all desires. Truth under all truths. He seemed to know, among other things, that he was solitary and must always be soo. . . . He was earth, and would return to earth. (265)

The coming of autumn, of yellow maple-leaves and evening, of sunset on the pines, reminds him that the cycle of life leads to darkness,

winter, death: "It is time" (266).

In Part I, the garden functions also as a substitute for escape. An orderly neat garden in the French fashion, its gravel and shrubs, its Lombardy poplars, geraniums and dahlias reflect the cultivation of nature through art:

In the spring, when home-sickness for other lands and the fret of things unaccomplished awoke, he could work off his discontent here. In the long hot summers, when he could not go abroad, he stayed at home with his garden. (15)

It becomes an escape from St. Peter's work, his creative powers, and his family, and he spends the summer while his family are "looting Europe", spraying his roses and working until the garden is more beautiful than ever before, until "the garden, in which he sat all day, was no longer a valid excuse to keep him from his study" (171). But the garden functions too as a bridge between the Professor and Tom. Tom comes first to the St. Peters' garden on "a bright, windy spring day" (112), and his death in the War is described in terms of it: "Tom Outland had not come back again through the garden door" (263). More important, the garden is related to the Professor's youth which, with Tom, will never return.

Tom's association with nature even in the urban setting of Hamilton is established clearly. He joins the family frequently in the garden during the first summer and fall (124), talks here to the Professor on warm summer nights, makes maps and villages in the sand with Rosamond and Kathleen, asks Rosamond to the senior dance, and during the summer his family are in the west, dines with the Professor and "talked and watched night fall in the garden" (176).

But it is Tom's relationship to the Blue Mesa, introduced in Part II, which is the key to the novel, and to the state of mind of Professor St. Peter. We see the Blue Mesa only through the eyes of Tom. Like Ray Kennedy, from whom Tom is descended, he is a true child of nature; he has led the romanticized life of a Catherian working man, first as a call-boy in Pardee, Mexico, and later with Roddy on the range for the Sitwell cattle-company. Roddy too is untainted by society, "the sort of fellow who can do anything for somebody else and nothing for himself. There are lots like that among the working-men. They aren't trained by success to a sort of systematic selfishness" (185). To both Roddy and Tom, nature becomes a freedom from the rules and sterile regulations of society:

Roddy was proud. He didn't like taking orders and living on pay cheques. He liked to be free, and to sit in his saddle all day and use it for a pillow at night. (124)

Even before they have attempted it, the Blue Mesa challenges Tom and Roddy, no longer inanimate but "our only neighbour", no longer featureless but "like the profile of a big beast lying down" (191). The old settlers tell him no one has yet climbed up its steep sides and Tom vows to attempt it before they leave. Apart from the mountainsheep on the high rock ledges, priestlike in their devotion to this life, only the Pueblo Indians have successfully challenged the Blue Mesa on its own terms and been ennobled by their struggle: "A people who had the hardihood to build there, and who lived day by day looking down upon such grandeur, who came and went by those hazardous trails, must have been . . . a fine people" (213).

Even before their climb, the Mesa promises much, lit up in

the morning and at night: "Our camp would be cold and grey, but the mesa top would be red with the sunrise, and all the slim cedars along the rocks would be gold" (192). Its air is uncontaminated, with a hint of snow, pure and full of exaltation, the water "like liquid crystal. . . [which] threw off the sunlight like a diamond" (209). But it is only after his trip to Washington that Tom realizes that the Mesa is his true homeland, that he is homesick for the sight and touch of it (240):

Once again I had that glorious feeling. . . of being on the mesa, in a world above the world. And the air, my God, what air!-- Soft, tingling, gold, hot with an edge of chill on it, full of the smell of pñons--it was like breathing the sun, breathing the colour of the sky. Down there behind me was the plain, already streaked with shadow, violet purple and burnt orange until it met the horizon. (240)

For the Mesa represents an escape from Washington and the dull, sordid life of common people to the freedom and purity of nature: "I wanted nothing but to get back to the mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings" (236).

Although Tom's escape has been temporary, for he has returned to society to create his principle of the vacuum, and to sacrifice himself through the war, he has always for the professor remained a part of the Blue Mesa, uncontaminated by the materialism of the society he has served. The romanticism of St. Peter's dream is suggested in Kathleen's childhood version of Tom's adventures:

That was my romantic dream when I was little, finding Roddy! I used to think about it for hours when I was supposed to be taking my nap. I used to swim rivers and climb mountains and wander about with Navajos, and rescue Roddy at the most critical

moments, when he was being stabbed in the back, or drugged in a gambling house, and bring him back to Tom. . . . Now that Rosamond has Outland, I consider Tom's mesa entirely my own. (131)

Essentially the Professor's dream is not so different, although less dramatized. But he comes to realize that he must live on after Tom's death. He cannot escape life through a shipwreck, nor can he return to Tom's mesa for the remainder of his life. Tom has been saved by death to become an ideal.²³ "He had made something new in the world,-- and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others." (261). He too would have suffered from family problems, university and community problems. A true relationship to nature is possible in the modern world only through a dream.

Like his ancestors, the Professor has rejected the art of the Old World for the nature of the New, as indicated in his preference of the Southwest to Notre Dame:

If he went anywhere next summer, he thought it would be down into Outland's country, to watch the sunrise break on sculptured peaks and impassable mountain passes--to look off at those long, rugged, untamed vistas dear to the American heart. Dear to all hearts, probably--at least calling to all. Else why had his grandfather's grandfather, who had tramped so many miles across Europe into Russia with the Grand Armée, come out to the Canadian wilderness. (270)

Yet his choice of death rejects this power of nature for a belief in the meaninglessness of life, in which the relationship to nature is no longer a solace but a fear of the unknown. This apprehension has been developing for some months, a fear of the whole universe as chaotic and without order as human life and society:

The world was sad to St. Peter as he looked about him; the lake-shore country flat and heavy, Hamilton small and tight and airless. The university, his new house, his old house, everything around him,

seemed insupportable, as the boat on which he is imprisoned seems to a sea-sick man. Yes, it was possible that the little world, on its voyage among all the stars, might become like that; a boat on which one could travel no longer, from which one could no longer look up and confront those bright rings or revolutions. (150)

His acceptance of Death as that last house of man, the Truth where man finds "release from every obligation, from every form of effort" (272), is not reversed with his last-minute decision to face "life without joy". For this joy, the joy of art and nature, has given meaning to the Professor's existence, and his life from this point on is not a symbolic rebirth but a mental death.

Man, Art and Society: "For thee a house was built" (272)

The central meaning of The Professor's House depends upon the identification of the ideal characters with art, and of the other characters with an alien and predatory non-art society. This pattern is repeated throughout the novel.²⁴ The Professor himself is destroyed by the society around him, in the form of his family, the university, the town, and post-war America; he lives on but without art. Tom is destroyed first through Roddy's sale of his artifacts to a European collector, then through the war in which he is killed, and finally, as an ideal for the Professor, through the commercial spirit of a community which can build the expensive "Outland" out of the funds accumulated through commercializing his discovery of the vacuum principle. The Pueblo Indians too have built their civilization around art and ordered civilization. They are destroyed first by a wandering and uncultured peoples who find them in their winter grazing grounds and extinguish them, and later, as an ideal, in their rape by

a modern society which sees them only as a material possession, valuable only if it can be bought and sold.

The identification of the Professor as artist is implicit in the novel, rather than explicit, and is evident in his ideals and standards, his tastes and choices. Sergeant indicates that his tastes, prejudices and passions are those of Cather herself.²⁵ Thus his conflict, his attempt to resolve the present and the past, modern society with art, becomes at least in part, the problem of Cather the artist after 1925. We learn very little of this art, the seven volumes of history which he has completed some time before the opening of the novel, except that they are "unconventional" and of course misunderstood except by a few brilliant men until their completion (32). St. Peter then is the true Cather artist, misunderstood and isolated, unrecognized by lesser and more popular writers. Yet like Cather herself, the Professor is finding that this desired recognition, when it finally comes, is a burden rather than a blessing, even a bar to further creative output.²⁶

The Professor's relationship to nature, like Thea's, is the inspiration for his art and directly influences his writing. The little attic room in Hamilton looks towards Lake Michigan which "had been of more assistance than all the convenient things he had done without" (31). In form and structure, the histories are directly patterned on natural order, although how we are not told:

On the voyage everything seemed to feed the plan of the work that was forming in St. Peter's mind; the skipper, the old Catalan second mate, the sea itself. One day. . . the ranges of the Sierra Nevadas towered on their right, snow peak after snow peak, high beyond the flight of fancy, gleaming like crystal and topaz.

St. Peter lay looking up. . . and the design of his book unfolded in the air above him, just as definitely as the mountain ranges themselves. And the design was sound. He had accepted it as inevitable. (106)²⁷

Although St. Peter is a historian and an academic, his relationship to his art is not in reality different from that of Thea. It is emotional rather than intellectual, primary rather than secondary.²⁸ In retrospect he recalls the mood in which he approached his life work:

It was in those very years that he was beginning his greatest work; when the desire to do it and the difficulties attending such a project strove together in his mind. . . when he had the courage to say to himself: "I will do this dazzling, this beautiful, this utterly impossible thing!" (25)

Like Thea, too, his art is based on desire, as he indicates when he explains that he has been able both to "feed himself" to his students through his lectures, and preserve the ardour of his creative inspiration: "A man can do anything if he wishes to enough, St. Peter believed. Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process" (29). And his history takes shape with the intuitive form of the work of art; the Professor feels it growing in his mind like an embryo:

The whole plan of his narrative was coming clearer and clearer all the time, when he could feel his hand growing easier with his material, when all the foolish conventions about that kind of writing were falling away and his relation with his work was becoming every day more simple, natural, and happy (32).

The identification of St. Peter as the artist is more explicit than the few references to his history, created out of desire and passion, would justify. Although he seems to contrast strongly with Thea, as masculine against feminine, passion against intellect, age against youth, he is really the artist at a later stage of existence both in his own life and in society, an artist in bondage to the

social life not only through his family but even through his art.

His appreciation of beauty in life is clearly similar to that of Cather and takes the form in the novel of a contempt for the ugly which equals any passages in Book II of My Ántonia or One of Ours. The Professor leads the comely life, a life which requires money but in which the element of money is subdued. He like the Archbishop is a connoisseur of food and wine and the graces of life. His Christmas lunch is packed by Lillian: "chicken sandwiches with lettuce leaves, red California grapes, and two shapely, long-necked russet pears", a round cheese, and a bottle of wine. He keeps a sherry glass available and polishes it for his wine, and Lillian has included one of her best dinner-napkins "knowing he hated ugly linen" (102). He dines in bachelor splendour with Tom in his garden on "a fine leg of lamb, saignant, well rubbed with garlic. . . a dish of steaming asparagus, swathed in a napkin to keep it hot, and a bottle of sparkling Asti" (176). His final decision, to live on "without joy", is equated with living without sherry during Prohibition (282). Yet the emphasis in the novel is not placed here but upon the contrast between the comely life of the St. Peters' and the ugly lives of the townpeople, in particular of Crane, his plain wife and his three plain daughters. The description of the Cranes is devastating:

Doctor Crane had married a girl whom no other man ever thought of courting, a girl of whom people always said: "Oh, she's so good!" chiefly because she was so homely. They had three very plain daughters, and only Crane's salary to live upon. (134)

The Professor avoids their house, for Crane "lived in the most unnecessary and depressing ugliness" (142). Yet the Professor does realize that

he himself is divided, that the materialism in society is within himself. Although he notes in Lillian the development of "that worldliness, that willingness to get the most out of occasions and people" (160), he admits that the comfort of his life has been due to this same worldliness:

She and his daughters had never been drab and a little pathetic, like some of the faculty women. They hadn't much, but they were never absurd. They never made shabby compromises. If they couldn't get the right thing, they went without. Usually they had the right thing, and it got paid for, somehow. He couldn't say they were extravagant; the old house had been funny and bare enough, but there were no ugly things in it. (161)

It is this fastidiousness in him that leads him to appreciate Louis' hospitality in Chicago: a room on the lake front, the best tickets for Mignon, the public celebration of Rosamond's birthday at dinner, and the envy of his colleagues not for his histories but for his fortune in a son-in-law. Although he bitterly rejects this "public magnificence" as false, he nevertheless is inclined to it against his will (96). And thus the worldly exists in conflict with art even in the personality of the Professor.

The Professor's attitude to art is revealed through his relationships in the novel, to the ideal of Tom Outland, to the Pueblo artists whom he sees through Tom's eyes, and to the societies which prey upon the artist and destroy his creativity. The development of the history is influenced by Tom and, through his imagination and insight, by the natural and cultural world of the Southwest. As a result, the last four volumes become "more simple, more inevitable", more closely related to the country than the previous three (258-9).

The central book of the novel reveals the artist Tom Outland

at first hand; elsewhere the real Tom is secondary to the Professor's idea of him which is all that remains in the present. Tom is both a man of nature and an artist, the one individual in Cather who truly combines these roles.²⁹ Like Jim Burden he assesses his experience through the form of narrative, although his style is more strictly circumscribed by chronology and his previous education than Jim's. But it is really the Professor who interprets Tom for us, and the important element in the novel is not what Tom has been, but what Tom has meant to others.³⁰

Like Thea and the Professor, Tom finds in nature the inspiration for his art, first the art of recording his impressions, and secondly the art of scientific experiment which earns him a posthumous reputation. After his betrayal by Roddy he returns to the mesa and writes:

All of me was there. This was the first time I ever saw it as a whole. It all came together in my understanding, as a series of experiments do when you begin to see where they are leading. Something had happened in me that made it possible for me to co-ordinate and simplify and that process, going on in my mind, brought with it great happiness. It was possession. . . . Every morning, when the sun's rays first hit the mesa top, while the rest of the world was in shadow, I wakened with the feeling that I had found everything, instead of having lost everything. Nothing tired me. Up there alone, a close neighbour to the sun, I seemed to get the solar energy in some direct way. (250-2)

Close to nature, on the mountain top of artistic experience, under the creative power of the sun which brings forth genius, alone and apart from the world, Tom becomes the archetype of the Cather artist. And with him he carries the culture of the Old World in the form of the Aeneid. Like Jim Burden he relates this nature to the world of literature, although unlike Jim he sees no part of society except

the dead pueblo world, perhaps a significant indication of Cather's increasing isolation, and of her rejection of the whole of society through the Professor:

When I look into the Aeneid now, I can always see two pictures: the one on the page, and another behind that: blue and purple rocks and yellow-green pñons with flat tops, little clustered houses clinging together for protection, a rude tower rising in their midst, rising strong with calmness and courage. (252-3)³¹

Here Tom combines a sophisticated version of Ray Kennedy, the man of nature who visits the Cliff-dwellers and records in his diary the impressions of their life and of human civilization, and Dick Wetherill, the real discoverer of the Mesa Verde who found these ancient pueblos when he crossed the Mancos river to search for cattle, as his brother narrated to Cather.³² But Tom is the artist too. He does not struggle to control the language like Ray, to sift through the metaphors and discover the permanence under the temporal flux of life; his style is sure and skilled:

If words had cost money, Tom couldn't have used them more sparingly. The adjectives were purely descriptive, relating to form and colour, and were used to present the objects under consideration, not the young explorer's emotions. Yet through this austerity one felt the kindling imagination, the ardour and excitement of the boy. (262)

Moreover, he combines with the diarist and the discoverer of the Mesa Verde, an invention in chemistry, the principle of the Outland vaccuum. Apart from the incredibility of the plot, which attributes to a youth of twenty discoveries of worldwide importance in fields as far apart as archeology and chemistry, Cather faces a more central problem. While the commercialization of the Mesa is

not implicit in its discovery, the commercialization of the vacuum is an obvious outcome of the research, for a discovery is only a discovery if it has practical application. Thus the ideal of Tom is destroyed not by external society but by internal forces which would have revealed themselves with time. Tom was the artist, noble, creative, heroic, yet only death preserves him from modern society with its destructive materialism. The Professor admits:

He couldn't see Tom building "Outland", or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton. What change would have come in his blue eye, in his fine long hand with the backspringing thumb, which had never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas? A hand like that, had he lived, must have been put to other uses. . . . It would have had to 'manage' a great deal of money, to be the instrument of a woman who would grow always more exacting. He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world-- and the reward, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others. (261) ³³

The ideal of the artist has no place in the modern world. In order to live on, the Professor must renounce his art, and with it joy and all that he has previously found meaningful in life.³⁴

The records of Tom Outland are also the Professor's source of knowledge concerning the Pueblo folk art. The Pueblo Indians find in nature the forms of art; as Ray Kennedy has told Thea "What I like about those old aborigines is, that they got all their ideas from nature".³⁵ Their central achievement is indicated by Father Duchesne:

Wherever humanity has made that hardest of all starts and lifted itself out of mere brutality, is a sacred spot. . . . With no incentive but some natural yearning for order and security. They built themselves into this mesa and humanized it. (221)

Living "an orderly and secure life" on the mesa (219), they have established a culture based on creativity. Their arts are simple and hand-made, and both architecture and pottery reveal their "distinct

feeling for design". Father Duchesne notes their artistic superiority to native tribes as a whole:

Their workmanship on both the wood and stone of the dwellings is good. The shapes and decorations of the water-jars and food bowls is better than in any of the existing pueblos I know. (219-20).

The cedar joists cut with stone-axes and carefully sanded, the polishing of the poles under the clay floor, the fresco of geometric patterns on the pink or yellow adobe walls, even the carefully made surgical instruments, all reveal the "patience and deliberation" of the artists (212), their combination of care with skill and craft, and both with design and simplicity. Even their jewellery is simple, closely related to nature; fresh from the mines, their turquoises are "soft blue stone, the colour of robins' eggs, or of the sea on halycon days of summer" (120).³⁶ To Tom, they become real through their art, more real than even his friendship with Roddy, and he treasures the pieces of pottery, still black from the soot of their long-gone fires (119).

The Pueblo culture is destroyed twice in the novel. First some predatory society, Father Duchesne speculates, left the town abandoned and the old alone to die: "some roving Indian tribe without culture or domestic virtues, some horde that fell upon them in their summer camp and destroyed them for their hides and clothing and weapons, or from mere love of slaughter" (221). In the present, they are destroyed by the non-art society of Washington, who indicate their lack of culture through their treatment of the jars as ash-trays and through the director's preference for a good dinner at an expensive

hotel: "If you show him enough of the Shoreham pottery, that will be more effective" (230). And Roddy, symbol of this society, sells it to a German dealer for four thousand dollars: "he'd always supposed I meant to 'realize' on them, just as he did, and that it would come to money in the end. 'Everything does', he added" (244). And so the United States sells its culture, its legacy from the past "preserved through the ages by a miracle, and handed on to you and me" (244) for money, and sacrifices the heritage of its ancestors for a government-expense-paid trip to the International Exposition in Europe.

The Professor's relationship to these artists, to Tom Outland and to the creative pueblo society, has given meaning to his life and art. But these societies are past and Tom is dead; his renunciation of them for the modern world in the end is his renunciation of art. His acceptance of the new society, though "without joy" is indicated in his acceptance of the new house.

As. E. K. Brown indicates, the three societies of the novel are represented in the architecture of the four houses, the cliff-dwellings of the Pueblos, the old attic of the Professor and Tom, the new house of Lillian, and "Outland".³⁷ The materialist values of the modern world are reflected in the Professor's new house which he basically rejects, and in "Outland", the home built by Louis and Rosamond in opposition to all the tastes of Tom himself. The new house is significant only for its functional design, and remains undescribed in the novel, except for its modern bathroom: "as his wife said, 'If your country has contributed one thing, at least, to civilization, why not have it?'" (12). There is no view of the

lake to inspire creativity and, significantly, the Professor does not begin a garden, returning to the old house to tend his dahlias in July, "Outland" on the other hand is eclectic in style, the cultural inheritance of modern society from the creativity of the past; it is set between the "primeval forest" and the beaches of Lake Michigan, designed by a Norwegian architect who was trained in Paris, modelled on the line of a Norwegian manor house (38-9), and filled with furnishings of France and Spain which Rosamond acquires "like Napoleon looting the Spanish palaces" (154).

The Professor retreats from these to his old comfortable study which Brown points out, parallels the description of the cave-dwellings on the Mesa.³⁸ Behind the mesa dwellings, the roof of the cavern meets the floor "exactly like the sloping roof of an attic" (209). At the back of the cave, the "perpetual twilight" provides refuge from the blazing sun and the floors of the houses are covered with yucca-fibre mats (208-9). The Professor's study too is dark, a refuge from life and lit by one square window. The matting on the floor is "worn and scratchy"; the ceiling, low and sloping on three sides, is yellowed and neutral with age (16). But the parallel is not simply verbal, for both are refuges, inviolate from the predatory conquerors.³⁹ Here the pots and jars remain safe and unbroken; here the Professor's manuscripts and notebooks are tied in bundles (22). The appeal of the cliff-city to Tom has been its preservation into the present of a time before Columbus, a preservation which is static and essentially lifeless:

Such silence and stillness and repose--immortal repose. That

village sat looking down into the canyon with the calmness of eternity. . . . It was more like sculpture than anything else. I knew at once that I had come upon the city of some extinct civilization, hidden away in this inaccessible mesa for centuries, preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual sunlight like a fly in amber, guarded by the cliffs and the river and the desert. (201-2)

It resembles the permanence of art caught by Keats in his Grecian Urn, yet Keats' recognition that the urn is lifeless, a "cold pastoral" is not paralleled by Tom and the Professor.⁴⁰ For the Professor tries to make of the attic a refuge from life like the mesa: "There were some advantages about being a writer of histories. The desk was a shelter one could hide behind, it was a hole one could creep into" (161).⁴¹ When Augusta threatens to move her dress forms, the Professor replies, "I can't have this room changed if I'm going to work here" (21). Increasingly the couch becomes "his refuge from this ever-increasing fatigue of daily life" (271). Ultimately, he comes to recognize that only through death can Time stop and life become unchanging and eternal. Through death alone the Cliff-city has been preserved, and St. Peter is drawn to the unchanging nature of that last house of the human spirit:

Lying on his old couch, he could almost believe himself in that house already. The sagging springs were like the sham upholstery that is put in coffins. . . . Now he thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth. (272)

Professor St. Peter's relationship to his art too is dead. He carries with him the memories of its power. But the art is past, and it is replaced by money. When Lillian asks if the Professor wished to have anything other than a new house with the Oxford prize of five thousand pounds, he replies:

Nothing, my dear, nothing. If with that cheque I could have brought back the fun I had writing my history, you'd never have got your house. But one couldn't get that for twenty thousand dollars. The great pleasures don't come so cheap. (33)

The implication is that the Professor's creativity has been smothered by financial profit. Yet the Professor's relationship to his work and his family has actually changed little. The life of his family has always been merely an adjunct to his central life, the life of art, and domestic life has been virtually a disturbance to this life. He writes by kerosene lantern, a preference of the past, but when the oil runs out, he uses the electric bulb rather than fetch oil from the kitchen: "On that perilous journey down through the human house he might lose his mood, his enthusiasm, even his temper" (27). He tells us that he had had "two romances: one of the heart, which had filled his life for many years, and a second of the mind--of the imagination" (258) which is reincarnated in Tom. Lillian truly realizes the extent of their separation and the difference in their approaches to life. To the Professor's "you're so occupied with the future, you adapt yourself so readily", she replies, "One must go on living, Godfrey. But it wasn't the children who came between us" (94). The attic room is nostalgic for it evokes memories of the past, both of creativity and of domestic existence. The Professor compares these memories to the Bayeux tapestry:

Just as, when Queen Mathilde was doing the long tapestry now shown at Bayeux,--working her chronicle of the deeds of knights and heroes,--alongside the big pattern of dramatic action she and her women carried the little playful pattern of birds and beasts that are a story in themselves; so, to him, the most important chapters of his history were interwoven with personal memories. (101)

Yet these personal memories are seen largely from the vantage point of the attic; the Professor watches the procession of life passing by but does not participate in it:

St. Peter reflected that those first years, before Outland had done anything remarkable, were really the best of all. . . . There had been fine times in this old house then: family festivals and hospitalities, little girls dancing in and out, Augusta coming and going, gay dresses hanging in his study at night, Christmas shopping and secrets and smothered laughter on the stairs. When a man had lovely children in his house, fragrant and happy, full of pretty fancies and generous impulses, why couldn't he keep them? Was there no way but Medea's, he wondered? (125-6)

These memories, idealized and sentimentalized by nostalgia, exist only in the Professor's memory, in contrast with the ugly relationships of the present; the family, the university, even society as a whole. In an essay on Katharine Mansfield, Cather analyzes in essay form the family tensions she recreates in fiction in The Professor's House:

I doubt whether any contemporary writer has made one feel more keenly the many kinds of personal relations which exist in an everyday "happy family". . . . Every individual in that household (even the children) is clinging passionately to his individual soul, is in terror of losing it in the general family flavour. As in most families, the mere struggle to have anything of one's own, to be one's self at all, creates an element of strain which keeps everyone almost at the breaking-point. . . . Always in his mind each member of these social units is escaping, running away, trying to break the net which circumstances and his own affections have woven about him. One realizes that human relationships are the tragic necessity of human life; that they can never be satisfactory, that every ego is half the time greedily seeking them, and half the time pulling away from them.⁴²

Lillian St. Peter is not an Enid Wheeler, cold and aloof, but a woman of energy and vitality, thrown back on her own resources as a result of her husband's isolation from life, and seeking in her sons-in-law the company she has not found in her husband.⁴³ The family

friction reaches a peak after the marriage of Rosamond and Kathleen to two completely different personalities, and Lillian rightly points out that St. Peter's treatment of the two young men is not patient but severe and intolerant: "You grow better-looking and more intolerant all the time. . . . Oh Godfrey, how can you be so poor a judge of your own behaviour?" (35). The difference in the personalities of Louis and Scott, the essential beneficence of the first and bitterness of the second, are not the product, but rather the cause of their financial disparity. And the antagonism in the family becomes bitter, Rosamond petty and malicious, disparaging the ordinary tastes of Kathleen, showing off her latest furs and emeralds with an air of importance, bargaining for her possessions "like Napoleon looting the Spanish palaces" (154), viewing Tom as a matter of dollars and cents (132); and Kathleen, green with jealousy, both envying and despising Rosamond's money, remembering Tom only as a past dream.

The modern university too is changed from the old institution of the past. The faculty is divided in dissension. Professor Langtry, whose uncle is president of the board of regents and influential in State politics, has succeeded in earning his place on the faculty through his influence on the "culture" of the new crop of farm-boys, on dress and manners. During the Professor's leave-of-absence, he nearly succeeded in removing him as head of department because St. Peter was doing research outside the field of the textbooks (55-6). The faculty meetings are fatiguing and involve long battles to retain academic standards amid the demands of new staff

for new courses in athletics, agricultural and commerce favoured by the State, for credits in book-keeping, farming and dress-making (58,140). Even Crane, whom the Professor has always considered his ally despite their aesthetic disparity, is corrupted into requesting of the Professor a share of the profits of Tom's invention and backing his demand with promise of a law-suit by his unscrupulous lawyer-brother-in-law. The architect's plan for the physics building has been despoiled by commercialism: "the State Legislature had defeated him by grinding down the contractor to cheap execution, and had spoiled everything, outside and in. Ever since it was finished, plumbers and masons and carpenters had been kept busy patching and repairing it" (143). Even the students themselves have deteriorated; there are no young creators like Tom Outland in the modern world, and the professor has lost interest in "feeding himself out to students":

Don't you notice a great difference in the student body as a whole, in the new crop that comes along every year now--how different they are from the ones of our early years here? . . . We have hosts of students, but they're a common sort. (53-4)

He finds it not worthwhile even to learn the names of the latest ones (271).

Finally the whole world of modern America has become corrupted, as presented in Tom's account of Washington. Their life is lacking in art, as indicated by their desire to keep Tom's jars for ashtrays, and the concern of the directors not for the ancient pottery of the Pueblos but for the modern pottery of the Shoreham dining-room (230). The directors at the Museum are interested chiefly in being taken to lunch or travelling to Europe to the International Exposition at the

expense of the Government. The clerks and office-men lead even more sterile lives, and seem to Tom "like people in slavery" (234). Their lives, like the young couples whom Tom lives with, are concerned with "trying to keep up appearances", being invited to dinners or teas, buying a new dress to wear to these functions; "every cab, every party was more than they could afford" (233):

I wanted nothing but to get back to the Mesa and live a free life and breathe free air, and never, never again to see hundreds of little black-coated men pouring out of white buildings. (236)

This is the world for which Tom has created and died: the world of Louis and Rosamond, to whom he was engaged, the world of the university and Professor Crane, the world of Hamilton and of America. The Professor asks: "Was it for this the light in Outland's laboratory used to burn so far into the night!" (90).⁴⁴ The death of creativity in modern society is paralleled by the death of creativity in St. Peter. The conflicts of society have always existed except in his idealizing memory, but he has been able to take refuge in art. Now there is no more art; the springs of his creativity have dried up, and he is left to face the emptiness of life without protection. The loss of his art is more important than even the loss of love, his first romance: "the saddest thing in the world is falling out of love--if once one has ever fallen in. . . falling out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family, indeed" (275). Like Euripides, he takes refuge in a cave because he finds houses insupportable, the cave of the old attic overlooking Lake Michigan (156). Why, he asks himself, does he now want to "run away from everything he had intensely cared for?" (275). And he yearns

for Death, the last refuge of the human soul:

For thee a house was built
Ere thou was born;
For thee a mould was made
Ere thou of woman camest. (272)⁴⁵

The rejection of life has reached the centre of Willa Cather's universe. Not only family relationships but even creativity is accidental, not part of the real self but an off-shoot from the primitive essentials of humanity:

[His life] had been shaped by all the penalties and responsibilities of being and having been a lover. Because there was Lillian, there must be marriage and a salary. Because there was marriage, there were children. Because there were children, and fervour in the blood and brain, books were born as well as daughters. His histories, he was convinced, had no more to do with his original ego than his daughters had; they were a result of the high blood pressure of young manhood. . . . [He] was not a scholar. He was a primitive. He was only interested in earth and woods and water. . . . He was earth, and would return to earth. (265)

His inclination to death rather than life, to nature rather than art and society, marks the climax of the Professor's and Cather's disillusionment with the world of the present⁴⁶, and the real initiation of the order of religion for a solution to the problems of life unsolved in nature and art.

The Artist and Religion: "the taste of bitter herbs" (280)

The Professor's House is a religious novel, claims E. K. Brown, "not by any answers it proposes, but by the problems it elaborates, and by the atmosphere in which they are developed".⁴⁷ If we define religion in the terms of Paul Tillich as 'man's ultimate concerns with the meaning of life and with all the forces that threaten or support that meaning'⁴⁸, then we may agree. For the

real issue of The Professor's House becomes ultimately not Art or Society as in The Song of the Lark, A Lost Lady and One of Ours but Life or Death? And the resolution of this crisis, although in terms of life, is actually as Randall points out, a stoicism which involves a spiritual suicide, which rejects the ideal of the artist as conquering hero for man as subject to chance and fate.⁴⁹

Professor St. Peter's attitude to religion is significant. for it suggests Cather's own attitude in 1925 to the Church of England which she has recently joined, her determination to accept the "bloomless side of life" (280). Her apathy and resignation indicate that Cather is unable to accept theologically the tenets of the Christian church; indeed after Death Comes for the Archbishop, she was to remark "No faith can save one from the great spiritual duality of our time--the conflict between the brave ideals of our pioneer ancestors, and the mounting materialism and industrialism of our post-war world".⁵⁰

Religion in Books I and II of The Professor's House has been approached in terms of nature and art. To Tom "the mesa was no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion" (251) and this emotion is inextricably tied to art through his reading of the Aeneid and his identification of Vergil with the canyon (252-3). Tom's discovery of this new order of being is related in terms of a religious experience: "I wakened with the feeling that I had found everything, instead of having lost everything. Nothing tired me" (251). The tower "rising in their midst, rising strong, with calmness and courage" suggests the triumph of order and the arts of civilization; it seems

to be a watchtower for astronomical observation rather than a religious symbol.⁵¹ For Tom, then, it is nature and art which require worship; there is no other religion.

The attitude of Professor St. Peter to religion is indicated in Book I in the famous lecture "Art and religion (they are the same thing in the end, of course) have given man the only happiness he has ever had" (69). And like art, religion is important for its drama, its pomp and circumstance and ritual, its contribution, even though illusory, to our sense of meaning in life: "That's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives" (68). The Professor sees the Christian theologians as great artists who revised the books of the Law till they achieved a dramatic effect; the sculptors and glass-workers and painters revealed the truth of the prayer: "Thy will be done in art, as it is in heaven" (69). Even the Virgin Mary is seen as an artist, for the Professor is struck, not by the Virgin's expression of religious emotion in the Magnificat, but by the fact that she has composed this piece of poetry (100). His associations with Christmas, like those of all Cather's characters including the Bishop, centre around pagan festivities and dining, first on his delicate lunch of chicken sandwiches, California grapes, and "two shapely long-necked russet pears", and later with his wife's family dinner in the evening. The only religious associations are the ringing of the bells from Augusta's church which summon him, not to contemplation of religious verities, but to lunch! (102).⁵²

There is, too, a negative attitude to religion which has

been evident in earlier novels in the small town society of Moonstone, and in Enid Wheeler and her sterile religious piety. This view of religion is typified by Professor Crane whom St. Peter both despises and pities. Crane's asceticism includes the rejection of pleasures of life which St. Peter affirms as part of the joy of living:

Crane seemed to have no social needs or impulses. He never went anywhere, except, once a year, to a dinner at the President's house. Music disturbed him too much, dancing shocked him--he couldn't see why it was permitted among the students. Once, after Mrs. St. Peter had sat next him at the President's dinner-table, she said to her husband: "The man is too dreary! All evening his heavy underwear kept coming down below his cuffs, and he kept poking it back with his forefinger. I believe he thinks it's wicked to live with even so plain a woman as Mrs. Crane." (141-2)

The humour of her remark partially obscures the fact that Crane's sins are largely social and aesthetic rather than religious, and that all three sins are equated as morally reprehensible.

The real symbol in the novel of religion is the German sewing woman Augusta. It is only in Book III that Augusta emerges as the character who will "save" the Professor from death and from himself, although this function is carefully prepared in Book I in the Professor's statement: "You'll never convert me back to the religion of my fathers now, if you're going to sew in the new house and I'm going to work on here. Who is ever to remind me when it's All Souls' Day, or Ember Day, or Maundy Thursday, or anything?" (24-5). Augusta's beliefs are, like herself, plain and simple. She is "a reliable, methodical spinster, a German Catholic, and very devout" (16); "tall, large-boned, flat and stiff, with a plain, solid face and brown eyes not destitute of fun" (23).⁵³ Her view of the Church too is simple, and she condemns the switches and rats which scandalize the priest.

in the homes of his female parishioners. It is Augusta who will bring order to the Professor as Lillian explains in her letter; she will see "that everything was properly put in order" (274). When St. Peter wakes in his study after his near suicide, he hears first of all the clock of Augusta's church (277), and sees Augusta beside him, reading by a kerosene lantern "a little much-worn religious book that she always carried in her handbag" (277). Her influence upon the Professor persuades him to accept life rather than death, and he confesses to himself, on his return to life and to human beings: "If he had thought of Augusta sooner, he would have got up from the couch sooner. Her image would have at once suggested the proper action" (279-80). Why we are not told, but Augusta is identified with the acceptance of life and death, of age and suffering and pain. Unsentimental, she speaks of death with solemnity, of her sewing for the bereaved family: "She talked about death as she spoke of a hard winter or a rainy March, or any of the sadnesses of nature" (281). She "wasn't at all afraid to say things that were heavily, drearily true" (280), although the Professor has evaded these remarks uncomfortably in the past. He finds the solace of Augusta comforting, preferring her to any other human being, her kindness and loyalty, her dependability-- "Seasoned and sound and on the solid earth she was" (281)--and he feels a sense of obligation toward her reality. Although his daughters have outgrown him, he thinks "there was still Augusta, however; a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound" (281). He has finally come to renounce his dream of Tom for the reality of Augusta and the future.

Yet the ending of The Professor's House, though the Professor passes through Carlyle's "Everlasting No," does not end in the "Everlasting Yea." The Professor comes to face the future "without delight . . . without joy, without passionate griefs" and "with resignation" (282-3), and this he must accept just as he must accept Prohibition. His recognition of reality, and of the need for a religion which embraces both life and death, joy and sorrow, does not bring him the happiness which he has renounced first in art and then in nature. He has chosen life at the last moment, yet the choice in itself is a negation of life and of the order of religion:

He had let something go--and it was gone: something very precious, that he could not consciously have relinquished, probably. He doubted whether his family would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to. . . . At least, he felt the ground under his feet. He thought he knew where he was, and that he could face with fortitude the Berengaria and the future. (282-3)⁵⁴

What he has relinquished has been the ideal of life which was embodied in Tom and in his creative powers. He has found life, but the cost has been too great. Although the Professor comes finally to accept the past as past, Cather herself is unable to live on without art, and she turns back to the past. Thea Kronberg recognized "You can't force your life into that old mould again. No, one can't go back"⁵⁵, but Cather cannot escape her own conviction: "Our present is ruined--but we had a beautiful past".⁵⁶ And with Jim Burden she returns to the beginnings, not of her own life, but of the American experience in the natural wilderness of the West, where she can feel "I had the sense of coming home to myself. . . [to] the precious, the incommunicable past".⁵⁷

PART III: THE ORDER OF RELIGION

II. INTRODUCTION

1. Religion and the Novel:

The relationship of religion to literature has not been dealt with extensively in literary criticism, and depends even more than that of nature or art upon an exact definition of terms. The handbook Catholicism qualifies the basic dictionary definition-- "the service and adoration of God or gods as expressed in forms of worship"¹ -- in the narrower sense of the Christian tradition, as that view of life which sees human experience as "an all-embracing growth in the awareness of and the response to God. It leaves no area of human experience apart from the transformation"² or as:

the coming to awareness of the fullness of divine revelation and the response of the total man, in love and knowledge, to the full implication of the divine revelation. . . the natural revelation of God in Christ, and the revelation of the Church.³

In this strict sense, few modern novels are specifically Christian; there is perhaps no need for fiction to supply a demand satisfied by biographies, autobiographies and sermons. The noted Protestant theologian Paul Tillich has defined religion more broadly, however, as

"related primarily not to orthodoxies of creed and dogma but to man's ultimate concerns with the meaning of life and with all the forces that threaten or support that meaning"⁴; and Randall Stewart in his American Literature and Christian Doctrine employs the similarly broad definition of W.B.J. Martin in Five Minutes to Twelve:

A "religious" book is the result of a religious attitude to life, it is the product of deep compassion, of a fundamental seriousness about the reality of good and evil, about the depth and power of evil. It is a book that takes seriously the human predicament, that does not gloss over what is ugly and malign and misshapen. It is informed and suffused with a great pity for man in his plight; it sees man, not men; the individual in his solitariness, not types or stock characters. It may not use religious terminology or quote the words of Jesus, but it stands where He stood, for all that is living, spontaneous and free, against all that is dead, mechanical, and necessitated.⁵

Using this definition, Stewart develops his thesis that many modern and seemingly agnostic works reveal a concern for the Christian themes of "man's moral dilemma, of his spiritual anxiety, and of sin and salvation",⁶ not only Cather, T.S. Eliot and William Faulkner, but also Hemingway and Robert Penn Warren.

In the nineteenth century a vigorous popular tradition in the religious novel produced a host of lesser descendants of Bunyan and Milton. For the most part, these revealed the remarkable interest of their period in dogma and sectarian issues rather than central moral and theological problems of the church.⁷ This group as a whole

had little influence on the modern novel or religious literature, though perhaps it affected the popular works of such writers as Thomas Costain and Lloyd C. Douglas. Their American contemporaries were concerned less with specific issues of orthodoxy and more with Tillich's fundamental sense of religion as 'man's ultimate concerns with the meaning of life' or Martin's compassion and pity for man caught between good and evil, for the spirit which underlies ritualism and formalism if not explicitly with the Church of God as central to human experience. Hawthorne for example studies, in his novels and short stories, central moral issues of human life. In The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables, he deals with guilt and redemption in the individual and the family, while The Marble Faun traces the fall of Adam, repeated in each individual, and his ultimate redemption through suffering; "Ethan Brand" is more truly humanist in the discovery of the hero that the only unpardonable sin is the manipulation of human beings to destroy their souls. Indeed Hawthorne, Poe and Melville are all concerned with what Levin has termed, in Melville's phraseology, "the power of blackness", with sin and death, guilt and absolution. There is some validity in Stewart's classification of Hawthorne and James with T.S. Eliot as Christian humanists in their

concern for "human imperfection, human improvement, the nature and purpose of the human experience",⁸ and with Melville, as counter-Romantics, for "they side with the orthodox, traditional, Christian view of man and the world".⁹

For the most part, their twentieth century successors have been less concerned with moral dilemmas. Naturalism, in its extreme form, claims to believe in a Godless universe in which man's fate is determined not by character and choice but by blind force and accident. And most post-war writers, Luccock notes in Contemporary American Literature and Religion, are concerned with castigating the shallowness of the modern American environment rather than with religion; fiction after the First World War, he observes, is marked by "Disenchantment, Dismay, Disintegration, Damnation".¹⁰ He claims that a religious concern is replaced in Dos Passes and Lewis by satire and anger, and in Cather, Dreiser, O'Neill and Ellen Glasgow by burlesque, indignation, pity and sympathy.¹¹ Yet he does allow, in the social protest literature of the thirties, a sense of religious value: "an overtone of moral order which cannot be outraged, a passionate concern for justice, a sympathy to men, a sense of sin in the feeling of participation in social wrong, and belief in human values".¹²

Other critics are more positive. Stewart for example notes Christian values in Cather, Eliot, William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren:

[They] have been dissatisfied with the prevailing naturalism which relieves man of responsibility and reduces him to an amoral puppet. They have taken the Christian view that man is a battleground. For man embodies both good and evil. God and the devil are still active in the world, and man's spiritual victories are won with God's help, and in Hell's despite. That is what Faulkner believes by man prevailing.¹³

Probably of these, Faulkner is the modern novelist most clearly "Christian" insofar as he is concerned with the fundamental problems of man's original sin and his need for discipline, sacrifice, suffering, and redemption,¹⁴ from the implicit Christian symbolism of The Sound and the Fury and Requiem for a Nun to the explicit use in A Fable of Christian myth as a framework for theme, action, character and incident.

Yet in the American novel as a whole in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is no apparent tradition of the religious novel with a common theme, development, or character type such as we find in the novel of nature or the artist novel. Nor do we find such a tradition in Britain, with the possible exception of Charles Williams. Even Graham Greene, perhaps, is closer to the European Mauriac in embracing a specifically Catholic view of human

nature, for Mauriac notes that Greene traces in his fiction: "the hidden presence of God in an atheistic world. . . the subtle subterranean movements of Grace operating outside the orbit of the temporal Church. . . the mystery of Infinite Love".¹⁵ In her religious novels, then, Cather neither accepts nor rejects a common tradition but develops her own form, using techniques and patterns with which she has experimented in previous works. These novels still concern the quest of the artist for order, here exemplified in religion, not unlike those of the pioneer and the artist. The difference lies in the use of religion as the end of the quest, and as the unifying pattern for the assorted tales, legends, miracles, works of art and daily experiences of life.

Eugene O'Neill in a letter to Nathan has stated;

It is the role of the playwright of today to dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply nibbling around on the surface of things.¹⁶

And in "Credo": "Most modern playwrights are concerned with the relation

between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am

interested in the relation between man and God".¹⁷ Sergeant tells of Cather's

reaction to O'Neill's plays: "O'Neill's stark revelations of lust, fear, weakness, cruelty, even poignant goodness, on the stage, offended her taste".¹⁸ In these late "religious" works, then, Cather rejects the material of the religious novelist, suffering and guilt, the need for redemption, the relationship between man and God, even justice and love and active good. She is not concerned with God or the Church as the centre of human existence and she nowhere suggests the limitations of individualism.¹⁹ Despite Randall Stewart's claim that Death Comes for the Archbishop is "the outstanding explicitly Christian novel",²⁰ the real problem of these late novels is suggested by Geismar to be their exclusion of any form of conflict including that between good and evil:

[The resolution of her spiritual turmoil has led to] a psychological universe where, if sin and depravity do exist, they are always modulated, where all violence or recklessness of feeling has been finally subdued, and where the emotional norm is mildness, sweetness, goodness. . . . Both Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock are tracts of divine love and of golden goodness which exclude just that uncertainty and anguish of human love, or that deeper sense of good and evil, which have been the distinguishing mark of her best work. By now the emphasis on religious ceremony has almost taken the place of the original emphasis on religion.²¹

Even allowing that Geismar has exaggerated the conflict of good and evil in the previous novels, the anguish of love, he does put his

finger on the religious deficiencies of these late works. Yet the tendency has been there from the beginning. As Jessup notes of the Christmas scene of My Ántonia and the "conversion" of St. Peter by Augusta, there is no real separation or tearing between Catholicism and Protestantism; we observe the religious differences as we might observe articles at a museum or scenes at an opera.²² This is truer of Death Comes for the Archbishop, "a series of tableaux, a diorama" which makes use of Catholic materials "with such potently spectacular effects as to agitate neither Protestant nor unbeliever".²³ Indeed we have not only the Protestant Cather but Father Latour, a Roman Catholic Archbishop of the nineteenth century in charge of a new diocese in New Mexico, explicating the values of Indian religion and its acceptance as a viable alternative to Christian Catholicism. The effect here is not similar to that of Forster's Passage to India, a reconciliation of religious opposites where Christianity, Mohammedanism and Hinduism merge into a view of the universe embracing all spatial, temporal and personal differences into one Supreme Unity. It is the product not of complexity reduced to simplicity, but of simplicity without complexity, breadth without depth.

Yet there is a secondary "religious" theme which appears in

only a few of Cather's works and then intermittently: the theme of love as salvation emerging in 'Neighbour Rosicky', Shadows on the Rock and Sapphira and the Slave-Girl, although there is evidence of it as early as O Pioneers!. This love is neither romantic nor sentimental like Jim's love for *Ántonia*, Ray Kennedy's for Thea or Cecile's for Pierre. It is not tainted by cynicism as the Professor's love for his family, nor unreal like Latour's love for a Vaillant he does not really comprehend. It is a mature and deep understanding of other human beings, an application of the First Commandment of Christ, to love thy neighbour as thyself, and as such, it is an essentially Christian expression.

It is the presence of this love in O Pioneers!, together with the recognition of struggle and conflict, suffering and emotional growth as a central problem of human existence, which gives this early novel a depth missing in Cather's better-known and more acclaimed works. Alexandra has previously shown her sense of love in her acceptance of Crazy Ivar into her household to save him from a sanatorium, but it is not until the death of Emil, and with him all her hopes for the future apart from the land, that she learns to accept suffering and to pass through it to a new form of life. And in this acceptance, she surpasses the Professor whose symbolic death leads only to death-in-life, a world without joy. Although Frank Shabata has directly caused her tragedy in his impulsive shooting of the lovers Marie and Emil, Alexandra's latent sympathy for his plight emerges when she visits him in prison and promises to plead for him with the Governor: "I can't help Emil now, so I'm going to do what I can for you".²⁴ Thus Alexandra escapes from the prison which symbolizes the fate of

man without beauty and love, and returns to life and the land, even to a renewed love with Carl Lindstrum.

This theme of sacrifice and redemption, of guilt and Mercy does not reappear again for many years, until Shadows on the Rock where it is a minor theme, in the religious stories of Jacques and the Bishop, and the secular stories of Bichet and Blinker. Jacques' gift of his only possession to the crèche of the Christ-child, sentimentalized though it may seem, nevertheless suggests a sacrifice for love greater than any demanded of Bishop Latour, who gives Sada his fur-lined cloak knowing very well that she cannot accept it, so that he gains the credit of sacrifice without the self-denial. Bishop Laval's care for his people indicates his compassion, in particular for the abandoned peasant child Jacques who reminds him of the infant Jesus. Yet the secular stories are more significant, for Auclair in his sympathy for the old knife-grinder Bichet, hung for stealing two old kettles from an empty coach-house, advocates love over the law: "The Law is to protect property, and it thinks too much of property. A couple of brass pots, an old saddle, are reckoned worth more than a poor man's life. Christ would have forgiven Bichet, as He did the thief on the cross. We must think of him in paradise".²⁵ And he comforts old Blinker who confesses he has been the torturer in the King's prison at Rouen: "Suffering teaches compassion", quoting the words of Queen Dido to Aeneas: "Having known misery, I have learned to pity the miserable".²⁶ Thus Auclair brings to him the measure of Divine Mercy, even though it is through the medium of the pagan classics. Man has fallen and sinned, yet his experience of suffering

teaches him compassion for others and humility and enables him to live on without guilt.

This Divine compassion for the suffering of humanity appears also in Sapphira and the Slave Girl in the character of Rachel Blake, Sapphira's widowed daughter who saves the Negro girl Nancy from the victimization of her mother, and sends her to Canada through the underground railway. Yet Rachel's role in the novel is neutralized through her father's lack of commitment and through the author's eventual obscuring of issues, her own changing attitude to Sapphira, and it is in the short stories of Obscure Destinies that Cather turns to the redemptive nature of love alone through a central character. For the "plot" of "Neighbour Rosicky" concerns Rosicky's conversion of his American daughter-in-law to the land and the resolution of conflict between Europe and America, the Old World and the New, the city and the country, nature and art, in Polly's coming child who will inherit his land. And this conversion is achieved through Rosicky's love which Polly comes to feel in the hour of his death:

She had a sudden feeling that nobody in the world, not her mother, not Rudolph, or anyone, really loved her as much as old Rosicky did. . . . It was as if Rosicky had a special gift for loving people, something that was like an ear for music or an eye for colour. It was quiet, unobstrusive; it was merely there. You saw it in his eyes. . . . You felt it in his hands, too. . . . It seemed to her that she had never learned so much about life from anything as from old Rosicky's hand. It brought her to herself; it communicated some direct and untranslatable message. 27

Apart from this message of love, the "religious" novels of Willa Cather are "religious" not in the sense that they deal with moral conflicts or with the relationship of man to God but in the sense that they use religion as a centre of order, an "aesthetic

solvent to unify incidents" as Josephine Jessup notes.²⁸ For in these works Cather chooses to evade the dilemma of evil and cruelty and suffering; she glosses over what Martin calls the central concerns of the religious writer, the ugly and malign and misshapen, the depth and power of evil.²⁹ To achieve a complete freedom from these problems, she leaves the present for the past, safe and secure, of the stable Catholic Church and the unformed and as yet unsullied frontier of America. And in this choice, she condemns her later works largely to the realm of a sentimental concern with manners, landscape and artworks rather than with the immediate concerns of a living contemporary society with real problems and moral questions.

2. Cather's Personal Quest: Doubt versus Affirmation.

The progression of Cather's search for order towards the Catholic Church is inevitable, given the conditions of her background and personality. The psychology which underlies this search

Trilling explains in After the Genteel Tradition:

The whole poetic romanticism of the nineteenth century had been suffused with the belief that the struggle rather than the prize was admirable, that a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for? Having seen the insufficiency of his philosophy Miss Cather must find another in which the goal shall be more than the search. She finds it, expectedly enough, in religion. The Catholicism to which she turns is a Catholicism of culture, not of doctrine. The ideal of unremitting search, it may be said, is essentially a Protestant notion; Catholic thought tends to repudiate the ineffable and to seek the sharply defined. . . . Catholic tradition selects what it can make immediate and tangible in symbol, and Miss Cather turns to the way of life that "makes the most of things", to the old settled cultures. She attaches a mystical significance to the ritual of the ordered universe, to the niceties of cookery, to the supernatural virtues of things themselves. . . . And with a religious ideal one may safely be a pioneer. . . the worth of their goal is indisputable.³⁰

In her own personal life, Cather's search was slow and marked by doubt. The affirmation of her Catholic novels Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock is not paralleled in her own life, and she later admitted to Mildred Bennett that "even her Catholic books were written out of admiration for a faith she could not quite accept".³¹ She found it "difficult to believe", Bennett tells us,³² and there is evidence of this doubt throughout her fiction, even in the later religious novels.

"Faith is a gift", Cather remarked shortly after receiving the news of the death of her cousin in World War I,³³ and it seems to be a gift which Cather herself basically lacked. In an early school oration she developed a scientific investigation of mysticism, and in the records of her childhood Bennett observes "there are strong evidences that religious doubt entered her mind."³⁴ Brought up as a Baptist, she followed her sister Elsie in joining the Episcopal church and was confirmed with her parents in Red Cloud on December 27, 1922; thus she was a part of that movement towards Canterbury and Rome of other noted literary figures: Newman, T.S. Eliot, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh. She remained part of the Red Cloud congregation until her death, although she no longer lived in Red Cloud, regularly sent checks for the altar guild and presented to the church a stained glass window of the good shepherd as a memorial to her father.³⁵ Yet this in itself suggests that she was not enough interested in the church to transfer her membership to New York where she was living and that her attachment was largely aesthetic and sentimental.

Cather's early attitudes to religion and in particular to the

Protestant church as reflected most strongly in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours, are conditioned by the narrow sectarianism of the Churches around Red Cloud. The nature of her attack is stated most clearly by Thea's conversation with Dr. Archie in The Song of the Lark. The incident begins "Thea was perplexed about religion";³⁶ her doubts arise with regard to the death of several schoolmates from typhoid fever so that, even here, Cather associates concern for religion with fear of death. But the epidemic has been caused by a social incident; a tramp, rejected by the town, commits suicide in the local water-supply and Thea asks Dr. Archie:

That's what I can't understand; do people believe the Bible, or don't they? If the next life is all that matters, and we're put here to get ready for it, then why do we try to make money, or learn things, or have a good time? There's not one person in Moonstone that really lives the way the New Testament says. Does it matter, or doesn't it?³⁷

While Thea represents Cather's own doubts as a child, Dr. Archie's answer is typical of Cather's own later attitude:

Every people has had its religion. All religions are good, and all are pretty much alike. But I don't see how we could live up to them in the sense you mean. I've thought about it a good deal, and I can't help feeling that while we are in this world we have to live for the best things of the world, and those things are material and positive. Now most religions are passive, and they tell us chiefly what we should not do. . . . We only have about twenty able, waking years. That's not long enough to get acquainted with half the fine things that have been done in the world, much less to do anything ourselves. I think we ought to keep the Commandments and help other people all we can; but the main thing is to live those twenty splendid years; to do all we can and enjoy all we can.³⁸

This last sentence, then, sums up Cather's attitude to religion until 1926 when she faces finally the approach of age and the oncoming of death. But although in her late novels she appears to accept Catholicism

as an end to man's search, a source of comfort when one has no longer "those twenty splendid years", there is further evidence of her own personal doubts, suggested most clearly by Count Frontenac on his deathbed:

He would die here, in this room, and his spirit would go before God to be judged. He believed this, because he had been taught it in childhood, and because he knew that there was something in himself and in other men that this world did not explain. Even the Indians had to make a story to account for something in their lives that did not come out of their appetites: conceptions of courage, duty, honour. The Indians had these, in their own fashion. These ideas come from some unknown source, and they were not the least part of life.³⁹

Even in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock where the chief characters are supposedly devoted Catholics and where many are actually religious figures, these doubts underlie the beliefs and structure of the narrative. For example, the Catholic church handbook observes of miracles:

A miracle is, by definition, an event perceptible to the senses which is beyond the power or order of nature and which can be attributed to God alone. . . . A Miracle is always an act of God in special providence for creatures.⁴⁰

Yet while Vaillant accepts miracles in the Church sense, Archbishop Latour defines these as not opposed to the laws of nature:

An apparition is human vision, corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices of healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see, and our ears can hear what there is about us always.⁴¹

In effect, this negates Divine intervention in human affairs except through a sharpening of human senses. In Shadows on the Rock too Cather approaches the miracle cautiously:

The people have loved miracles for so many hundred years, not as proof or evidence, but because they are the actual flowering of desire. In them the vague worship and devotion of the simple-hearted assumes a form. From being a shapeless longing, it becomes a beautiful image; a dumb rapture becomes a melody that can be remembered and repeated; and the experience of a moment, which might have been a lost ecstasy, is made an actual possession and can be bequeathed to another.⁴¹

Even this affirmation, which describes the miracle as a symbol or image, is questioned by Auclair's doubts concerning the miracles of the saints' bones which: 'may work cures at the touch, they may be a protection worn about the neck; those things are beyond my knowledge',⁴³ and by Pierre Charron's scepticism that the Church makes beavers into fish every Friday.⁴⁴

More important, these novels question the validity of sacrifice. While Father Hector can say "Nothing worthwhile is accomplished except by that last sacrifice, the giving on oneself altogether and finally",⁴⁵ Vaillant wonders:

To man's wisdom it would have seemed that a priest with Father Latour's exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome person, and delicate perceptions all have their effect. . . . But God had His reasons. . . . Perhaps it pleased Him to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality.⁴⁶

And Auclair questions in similar fashion the sacrifices of Noel Chabanel and Father Hector: "[He wondered] whether there had not been a good deal of misplaced heroism in the Canadian missions,--a waste of rare qualities which did nobody any good", and ultimately he resolves "perhaps that is the box of precious ointment which was acceptable to the Saviour".⁴⁷ Jeanne Le Ber's sacrifice has left her with a voice "like an old crow's" and a face of stone,⁴⁸ and Pierre states explicitly that she would have been a happy mother if the Church had not

taken her in childhood; "There are plenty of girls, ugly, poor, stupid, awkward, who are made for such a life."⁴⁹

This basic idea, that religion belongs to the old, the ugly, the poor or the stupid is not unique to Pierre; it typifies Cather's own reaction to the Protestant church of her youth as seen through Thea Kronberg and Claude Wheeler, where the church exists for those who have nothing else to live for, who are preparing to die. Thea's consideration of the meaning of religion occurs in the context of death; in Cather's other early works, death is incidental, a part of life recognized by the central character but not truly faced for he is protected by his youth, as indicated in Jim Burden's reaction to the suicide of Mr. Shimerda. The exceptions to this are O Pioneers! and One of Ours; in the first, death becomes meaningful through transfiguration into nature and in the second, through the heroic sacrifice of war. Neither is a central religious issue. Sergeant tells us that Cather frequently observed to her that "no one under forty could ever really believe in either death or degeneration", and Sergeant adds "She herself carried that physical nonchalance right on through her fifties".⁵⁰ In 1925, the year of publication of The Professor's House, Cather was over fifty and this fact marks her fiction, for she faces directly for the first time, the approach of old age and death.

The search for religion, then, is a search for stability in face of change and mystery. While the novels suggest Cather's underlying doubts, they also reveal her desperate attempt to cling to a faith which will not founder, which outlives nature and art, subject

to time and decay. Death becomes a common factor in these works and the title of Death Comes for the Archbishop, although the novel is concerned not with death but with life, indicates the direction of Cather's thought in these years. For Jean Marie Latour's death is, in a sense, Cather's own as she herself imagined it to be. It is not the death of a religious figure but of an artist very like Cather, trying to bring meaning to human life and experience not through God and the church but through secular memory:

During those last weeks of the Bishop's life he thought very little about death; it was the Past he was leaving. The future would take care of itself. But he had an intellectual curiosity about dying; about the changes that took place in a man's beliefs and scale of values. More and more life seemed to him an experience of the Ego, in no sense the Ego itself. This conviction, he believed, was something apart from his religious life; it was an enlightenment that came to him as a man, a human creature. . . . He was soon to have done with calendered time, and it had already ceased to count for him. He sat in the middle of his own consciousness; none of his former states of mind were lost or outgrown. They were all within reach of his hand, and all comprehensible.⁵¹

This death is apart from religious issues and from human strife. It is an ideal death, as the Bishop's life is an ideal life. It suggests the closest approach that Cather can make to the comfort and security of religion. But even here, affirmation is followed by doubt. After the publication of Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather conceded that religion cannot save man from the present of America, from industrialism and materialism, even from the problems of "the soul, the spirit, lamenting and tortured".⁵² For religion, like writing, provides only a temporary refuge from the human predicament and dilemmas, and when we look up from our faith or our work, we must face again the conflicts of life between the ideal and reality, hope and

despair.

3. Cather's Spiritual Quest: Protestantism versus Catholicism

Cather's movement toward Catholicism is slow but steady.

Geismar calls it "one of the most curious of all those curious spiritual pilgrimages in the late nineteen twenties":

This voyage of a spiritual malaise which pushes its way back from the epoch of the pioneers to the New Mexico of the eighteen-fifties and to the French Quebec of the early seventeen-hundreds, and even there, with the passing of the "old order", yearns for a still earlier time, a still more absolute cosmos of authority and faith, since on this rock, too, there are shadows.⁵³

And Trilling notes the paradox of her progress:

Reared on a Nebraska farm, she saw the personal and cultural defeat at first hand. Her forebearers had marched westward to the new horizons; her own work is a march back toward the spiritual east--toward all that is the antithesis of the pioneer's individualism and innovation, toward authority and permanence, toward Rome itself.⁵⁴

Thus the yearning for order, for a stable centre of changelessness in the midst of flux, which has been temporarily satisfied by nature in her early period and art in her middle phase, is now transferred to religion in general and the Catholic church in particular.

Cather's attraction to Catholicism is indicated early in her literary career in her occasional references to the Church but more consistently in her division of characters into two groups, the life-affirming Catholic characters with their warmth, simplicity, love of beauty and art, and the life-denying force of the Protestants, cold, sterile, ascetic and negative; the central characters, although Protestant, are caught between the two. Both Catholics and Protestants are stereotyped, simplified; Cather's Bohemians, her French Americans,

her Mexicans against the solid citizens of Main Street. Antonia and Marie Shabata are both life-symbols, both Bohemian, Catholic and creative; it is no coincidence that both are fruitful while the marriages of Jim and Alexandra are barren.

Her treatment of Protestantism in her early and middle periods is as condemnatory if less abusive, than Sinclair Lewis' in Elmer Gantry. What Lewis affirms through his attack on hypocrisy in the form of his business-man preacher, his levelling of religion with Zenith business operations and profits, Cather largely implies through her accord with the position of hero or narrator, although she too is on occasion quite explicit. In O Pioneers! this element of condemnation is largely muted, although the rejection by local society of the ascetic mystic Crazy Ivar implies her recognition of this issue even here. But in The Song of the Lark, and later in One of Ours the Church is attacked with vehemence. The Church is suitable only for those who are old or ill, who have lost their vitality to live. Thea's experience of prayer-meetings, where she must play the organ and lead the singing, suggests Cather's own early attitudes: "The usual Wednesday night gathering was made up of old women, with perhaps six or eight old men; and a few sickly girls who had not much interest in life; two of them, indeed, were already preparing to die".⁵⁵ They ask for prayers for absent children, or for faith to face the dark depressions of pain. Thea's reaction is typical; she considers these meetings "a kind of spiritual discipline, like funerals. She always read late after she went home and felt a stronger wish than usual to live and be happy".⁵⁶ That this attitude coincides with

Cather's own is indicated by Claude Wheeler's rejection of conversion in similar terms:

He did not want to renounce a world he as yet knew nothing of. He would like to go into life with all his vigour, with all his faculties free. He didn't want to be like the young men who said in prayer-meeting that they leaned on their Saviour. He hated their way of meekly accepting permitted pleasures.⁵⁷

And Claude's rejection of Temple College with its sophistries and evasions suggests Cather's own attitude to Protestantism: "The noblest could be damned, according to their theory, while almost any mean-spirited parasite could be saved by faith. 'Faith' as he saw it exemplified. . . was a substitute for most of the manly qualities he admired".⁵⁸

The Protestant Church in Cather's fiction is almost uniformly a church of negatives. Even in My Ántonia where Jim Burden partially accepts the fuller Protestantism of Grandfather Burden in Book I, he suggests in Book II its antithesis to life and vitality. Grandfather does not approve of dancing, and even more, he does not approve of Jim's attending the dances at the Fireman's Hall where the hired girls go; he objects to Jim's spending his evenings at Anton Jelinek's saloon and Anton tells him "Your Grandpa has always treated me fine and I don't like to have you come into my place, because I know he don't like it".⁵⁹ And the girls tease Jim that his grandmother is making him into a Baptist preacher: "I guess you'll have to stop dancing and wear a white necktie then".⁶⁰ The Baptist Professor Crane in The Professor's House never goes out except to dine once a year at the President's House, for "music disturbed him too much, dancing shocked him", and Mrs. St. Peter comments "I believe he thinks it's wicked to

live with even so plain a woman as Mrs. Crane".⁶¹ The intellectual concept which lies behind these negations is indicated in the description of Claude's mother:

She thought dancing and card-playing dangerous past-times--only rough people did such things. . . and 'worldliness' only another word for wickedness. According to her conception of education, one should learn, not think; and above all, one must not enquire. The history of the human race, as it lay behind one, was already explained; and so was its destiny which lay before. The mind should remain obediently within the theological concept of history.⁶²

But the most damning portrait is that of Claude's wife, Enid Wheeler, who practices prohibition not only on human beings but on the chickens, shutting away the rooster from the hens to keep the eggs fresher.⁶³ A fanatic like her mother, she serves dinners healthful but cold, like herself; she leaves Claude to attend a vegetarian sanatorium with her mother, to distribute Prohibition literature around the countryside, and eventually to nurse her sick missionary sister in China.⁶⁴ She finds sex repugnant and all in all, manages to make Claude's life "hideous to him".⁶⁵

Yet even these comments are less pointed than Cather's treatment of religious characters, again largely in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours. All the characters in Moonstone or Chicago who are related to religion are Philistines, shallow, worldly, lazy and antithetic to true art. Thea's father Peter Kronberg is a self-important little man who has chosen the Church because it represents an easy form of livelihood and who is admired by the women of the Church for the "conventional rhetoric of his sermons" and for his ministerial decorum: "He did not smoke, he never touched spirits. His indulgence in the pleasures of the table was an endearing bond between him and

the women of his congregation. He ate enormously with a zest".⁶⁶ His daughter Anna considers music as "nothing very real"⁶⁷ and believes in the total depravity of human beings. The Reverend Larson, an acquaintance of Kronberg from Divinity School, is even more lazy and self-indulgent, and his father has sent him to the seminary "to conceal his laziness from the neighbours".⁶⁸ He attends symphony concerts and plays his violin at women's culture clubs for "he could work energetically at any form of play",⁶⁹ and he enjoys all the pleasures of a soft existence: "He slept late in the morning, was fussy about his food, and read a great many novels, preferring sentimental ones. He did not smoke, but he ate a great deal of candy 'for his throat'".⁷⁰ Seven years later, Cather's picture of the clergy has not greatly changed. The teachers at Temple College are also weak, self-indulgent and shallow, "preachers who couldn't make a living at preaching",⁷¹ the students, boys who have failed out at the State University. They are represented by Edward Chapin, the stupid young man both studious and dull with whom Claude boards, his gushy sister Annabel, and Brother Weldon, the sanctimonious little man who influences Mrs. Wheeler to send Claude to Temple College and Enid to marry him--"the most important service devout girls could perform for the church was to bring young men to its support".⁷² Brother Weldon reappears later in the story to influence Claude's life. Both greedy and unctuous, he is characterized clearly as he says the blessing over the chicken and then sits "with devout, downcast eyes while the chicken was being dismembered".⁷³

In short, these characters summarize the negativism which

Cather attributed to the whole Protestant church. While undoubtedly there was much evidence in the small western towns of American of the pettiness, the snobbery, the narrow parochialism that Cather finds there, it is difficult to believe that there ~~was~~ nothing else. The only affirmative Protestantism is treated in Book I of My Ántonia in connection with Grandfather Burden, and against the evidence for negativism this measures little. Yet Grandfather Burden is patterned on Cather's own grandfather, so that she herself did have a wider experience of the church to draw from. Her deliberate choice of these negative elements suggest that she found little ^{of} importance to answer her own spiritual search in the Protestant church of these early years, and when she turned towards the Catholic way, she perhaps naturally saw in the Roman Church the counter to all the negativism and asceticism which she had come to hate so intensely in Red Cloud.

In the first novels, the Catholic church is the centre of existence for its peoples, the source of their life and warmth as well as their comfort in pain and death. For Emil's friend Amédée, the red brick church which had played a central part in his life, had been "the scene of his most serious moments and of his happiest hours. He had played and wrestled and sung and courted under its shadow".⁷⁴ Significantly, his funeral on Monday is preceded by a confirmation service on Sunday:

The Church has always held that life is for the living. On Saturday, while half the village of Sainte-Agnes was mourning for Amédée and preparing the funeral black for his burial on Monday, the other half was busy with white dresses and white veils for the great confirmation service tomorrow. . . . Father Duchesne divided his time between the living and the dead.⁷⁵

In the novels after My Ántonia, this Catholic element disappears; One of Ours treats negatively the Protestant church in a manner similar to The Song of the Lark and Book II of My Ántonia while in A Lost Lady religion plays no part at all.

But with The Professor's House, Catholicism reappears, not as part of the full texture of life but in the form of Augusta, as the preparation for death, the acceptance of "the taste of bitter herbs . . . the bloomless side of life that he had always run away from".⁷⁶ Religion now becomes necessary to give life any meaning. The mediaeval Catholic church, through art and ritual, brought to "the king and the beggar the same chance at miracles and great temptations and revelations. And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives".⁷⁷ In this novel, and the three following, as Sergeant points out, Cather comes to face death, to attempt to come to terms with age and mortality:

These works of her fifties have quite another form, dimension and vibration than have her Nebraska books. Their significance tends to the religious; they seek the decisions of the world, and the spirit on man's tragic fate. . . . The agonizing problem of mortality, the oncoming of death, is always present, and we are led to feel that unusual individuals, like Professor St. Peter and Myra Henshawe (My Mortal Enemy) must wrestle with them alone and single-handed--as, indeed, they must wrestle with the inevitable march of the twentieth century, which is felt as a menace to their moral poise and well-being.⁷⁸

Yet they are not quite alone; at the end, both Myra and the Professor turn to the traditional Catholic church for stability, for beauty, and for comfort in the alien world of contemporary society. What they seek here is expressed clearly by Myra Henshawe:

Religion is different from everything else; because in religion seeking is finding. . . . She seemed to say that in other

searchings it might be the object of the quest that brought satisfaction, or it might be something incidental that one got on the way; but in religion, desire was fulfilment, it was the seeking itself that rewarded.⁷⁹

For those weary of the world, the Church thus provides sanctuary, a place of rest similar to the peace which Jim Burden found in Nature: "that is happiness, to be dissolved into something complete and great".⁸⁰

This view of Catholicism is illusory, as Morton Zabel points out:

The Church to which she finally appealed as a human and historical constant, became in her uncomplicated and inexperienced view of it the most abstract of all her conceptions, a cultural symbol, not a human or historical actuality, and the least real of any of the standards she invoked in her judgements and criticism of the modern world.⁸¹

Yet that it is a product of Cather's own imagination does not change the fact that her fiction of this period reflects it. Where Myra Henshawe once lived her gay social life, where bands played and garden-parties followed one another, the Sisters of the convent walk two by two under the apple-trees: "Since then, chanting and devotions and discipline, and the tinkle of little bells that seemed forever calling the Sisters in to prayers".⁸² Age replaces youth; prayers, parties; and religion, art and the comely life. Myra's tragic fate is already foreshadowed in this early passage, her end where even romantic human love is viewed as a form of idolatry and replaced by hatred for her 'mortal enemy'. In these novels, Cather renounces her artistic code as expressed by Thea Kronberg: "There is only one big thing--desire",⁸³ for an illusory tranquility and peace. And finally Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock not only

reject any struggle between the soul and the world but deny conflict itself, preferring to concentrate on "the salad dressing" in place of Indian massacres,⁸⁴ the church triumphant rather than the dissident priests who simply vanish into thin air. The Professor and Myra Henshawe pass through Carlyle's "Everlasting No" but never really achieve his "Everlasting Yea". Archbishop Latour and the Auclairs inherit the "Everlasting Yea" without the struggle which makes them real and convincing, the suffering and the pain which man must undergo before he can attain the final affirmation.

The religious texture of these last novels, then, is rich but amoral. Cather is concerned with the aesthetics of the church, with the church as sanctuary, but never with the church as a theological issue or centre of the moral life like the less affirmative Pater in Marius the Epicurean. There is no real concern for God as the centre of order in the universe; although the nuns affirm his role as preserver of order, of night and day, light and darkness, sunlight and moonlight and starlight and time⁸⁵, elsewhere Cather rarely mentions either God or Christ. The experience of Jean Marie Latour in the opening section where he meditates on the Passion of Jesus and the thirst of Christ under the cruciform tree is unique in Cather's work; the only other references to Jesus are the painting of the baby-child in the Church of Notre-Dame de la Victoire, in the woodcut of little Saint-Edmond, and the miraculous appearance of the Holy Family to Father Junipero, introduced obtrusively into Book IV, Latour's death, and as second-hand narrative. The effect of these is totally different, removed by the naivety of the children and the simple

uncomplicated faith of the local missionary priests from the area of common experience and moral dilemmas. There is nothing, for example, to compare with the meditations of Callaghan's Father Dowling about the nature of Divine love and its connection with his concern for the souls of the two prostitutes:

No other priest spent so much time alone in the church on these Friday adorations as did Father Dowling. . . . He was meditating on love, on human love, divine love, and the love of man for God. Then he began to think of Ronnie and Midge, feeling that his love for them was growing, so that he might try and love them in his way as God must love everybody in the world. It seemed to him also that the more he could understand, love and help these girls, the closer he would be to understanding and loving God. So he made up his mind to be very patient, never to be angry.⁸⁶

In The Power and the Glory, the little priest comes to realize that the love of God for the world is the love which he feels for his bastard child, a love unreasoning, irrespective of her character and her contempt for him, a love which would sacrifice his own soul to preserve her from the evil which he knows is inevitable for her, and which he realizes he should feel for every one of his parishoners, for all men and women who come to him for redemption. And he prays for his executioners. E.J. Pratt's Father Brébeuf prays for the Indians who martyr him, finding the strength of his courage to outface even the bravest of their Indian heroes in:

the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.⁸⁷

But there are no similar passages in Cather; her concern for Catholicism lies elsewhere. The Virgin Mary appears more frequently than Christ, as statue or painting or doll to be dressed and fondled by the simple Mexican peasants, as the centre of Vaillant's May Devotions and as the

ideal of domestic life to which Cécile dedicates herself. This emphasis on Mary rather than Christ suggests Cather's real interest, the human rather than the Divine,⁸⁸ and in the hearth and woman as the cultural centre of life. The rich texture of the novels then which has led Francis Connolly to congratulate Cather on the closeness of her novels to the Catholic view of life⁸⁹ lies in the aesthetics of the Church, and in addition, in the inset narratives of legends, miracles and human experiences of the Divine in life, as well as the stories of the saints and martyrs, all of these related in summarized narration rather than dramatically recreated in the novels. Death Comes for the Archbishop is significant and rich not in depth but in breadth. It provides not only the central lives of the two Bishops, Latour and Vaillant, but also the contrasting lives of the dissolute priests, the miracles of the Virgin's appearance to Juan Diego, and the Divine guidance of Father Junipero and the simple faith of the Mexicans, the observances of the Indians, and the practices of the Spanish-American church. Likewise Shadows on the Rock incorporates the lives of Mother Catherine and Jeanne le Ber, Father Hector and Noel Chabanel, the decoration of the Churches and the pattern of the ecclesiastical year into a novel concerned primarily with the transfer of culture from the Old World to the New through the Church and the domestic life of the salon.

Catholicism then becomes what Jessup calls the "aesthetic solvent to unify incidents".⁹⁰ It resolves for Cather the basic antagonism between the Old World and the New, the established culture of Europe and the raw, crude frontier, the feminine and cultivated

field and garden, and the overpowering and masculine untamed land, even, as Geismar remarks, "asceticism with the best cuisine, and a renunciation of life with all the comforts of home. . . her need for spiritual absolution and her craving for worldly comfort and elegance in that final fusion of the Mesa and the Salon".⁹¹

Yet although Cather's next two novels, Lucy Gayheart and Sapphira and the Slave-Girl² are secular, her final novel turns once more to Catholicism as it is rooted in the French papacy at Avignon. Despite her growing scepticism as to the efficacy of any religion in the modern world--"No faith, she feared, could save one from the great spiritual duality of our time"⁹²— she felt a power in Rome drawing her back through space and time, to the Old World of the past and to a traditionalism and ritual which have no place in the world of the twentieth century. Her spiritual quest then did not end with her last Catholic novel but continued on throughout the remainder of her life until the time of her death and the final resolution of doubt concerning the world.

4. The Catholic Church: Sacrament versus Aestheticism.

The close interrelationship of sacrament and aesthetics in the Catholic Church has been frequently observed and demonstrated. In his article "Symbolism in Catholic Worship" Sullivan suggests that Catholic worship is centred on the official prayer of the Church, the liturgy, the Mass and on the Canonical Hours, the sacraments and sacramentals. Yet he notes that it recognizes the ambivalence of man, the division between body and soul, and he finds in the Liturgical

cycles of Christmas, of Lent, Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost, evidence of "a deep conviction that the realm of the material is a symbol of profound, inner spiritual realities, is the source of what is called the sacramental view of the universe":⁹³

The Liturgy, therefore, works on two levels, signifying in the material and natural orders the reality of the spiritual and supernatural orders. The official worship of the Church is therefore thus embedded in sensible signs symbolic of hidden realities.⁹⁴

The symbol recreates the past and anticipates the future. While the historic Incarnation is past, its spiritual meaning in Redemption remains, and the symbol of Christ as risen man becomes the union of man with the universe and God, of physical and spiritual, natural and supernatural, temporal and eternal.⁹⁵

Thus aestheticism is a proper part of Christian worship.

While the Protestant church has reduced its use of ritual and symbolism to a minimum, the Catholic church has retained into the present, its rich mediaeval heritage of ritual and art. Yet as Tillich observes, these religious symbols must be used to "point beyond themselves, to something which has conditional, unlimited and infinite meaning".⁹⁶

They operate on three levels, the transcendent level of God, the sacramental or the appearance of the holy in time and space, and the liturgical or ritual level which is a mixture of symbols and signs.

Of these three, he notes that Protestantism has lost the last and most of the second.⁹⁷

Cather's problem is that she chooses the aesthetic beauty of Catholic ritual and art but she never comes to see through these to the spiritual reality beyond. The sacramental aspect of Catholicism

she is not really concerned with. The cycle of the Christian year plays little part in her fiction. Although Christmas appears in nearly every work: O Pioneers!, The Song of the Lark, My Ántonia, The Professor's House, Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock and "Neighbour Rosicky", its significance is always connected to the hearth rather than the Incarnation of Christ in the flesh. The exceptions to this are the prayers of My Ántonia and the Christmas tree decorated with candles, Nativity figures and even a bleeding heart, and the Nativity scene in Shadows on the Rock where the child Jacques presents the carved wooden beaver, his only possession, to the Christ-child. Elsewhere the associations are secular and even pagan: the preparation of dinner, the memories of the past, warmth and harmony ~~out of~~ the elements, even in Death Comes for the Archbishop where the central discussion concerns the tradition of the soup and the difficulties of preparing a salad without greens. Easter appears rarely: Leo Cuzack is born on Easter day but this is given no real significance in the novel beyond a passing reference, and Lent in Death Comes for the Archbishop is mentioned only in association with the morbid and even sensual asceticism of Trinidad who scourges himself "so full of cactus spines that the girls have to pluck him like a chicken"⁹⁸ and who hangs all night on a cross, requesting to be scourged with cactus whips until he is made ill by the poison.⁹⁹ The Ascension, Pentecost, the Annunciation do not appear at all, and the only real religious ceremony appears to be Father Vaillant's observance of May as the month of Mary, while the passage is coloured extensively by the natural and fertility associations

of the garden.¹⁰⁰ In Shadows on the Rock, recognition is paid to the shape of the church year in All Soul's Day, All Saint's Day and Christmas, yet although these suggest the religious order of life in Quebec, they have little influence on action or character. In short, Cather is almost totally unconcerned with the liturgical cycle of the Catholic Church.

The chief sacraments of the Catholic religion too are given little attention. As decreed by the Council of Trent, the sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. Although most of these are mentioned at some point in the Catholic novels, they do not form a real pattern or order, even to the extent of the soup with its old traditions or the bells which recall the traditions of Europe and culture. In one passage in Death Comes for the Archbishop, the four sacraments of marriage, baptism, confession and confirmation are performed in few more words, and the remaining several pages of the incident describe the feasting and rest which follows upon these ceremonies. None of these ceremonies are described. Both Vaillant and Latour have taken Holy Orders many years before; Cecile is married offstage. And despite the predominance of death in these late works, although Myra Henshawe, the Archbishop and Count Frontenac all receive extreme unction, all die concerned with personal memories and problems which do not express a confirmed faith in God and an afterlife, while the death of Father Lucero is farcical. Even prayer is not an accepted part of life; in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather includes the following extraordinary statement: "[Father Latour] said his prayers

before he rolled out of his blankets, remembering Father Vaillant's maxim that if you said your prayers first, you would find plenty of time for other things afterwards".¹⁰¹

Clearly Cather is concerned with something other than the Church as theological dogma, as pattern of life or as sacrament. What she does seek is the satisfaction of the aesthetic, as she indicates in the Professor's lecture "Art and Religion (they are the same thing in the end, of course) have given man the only happiness he has ever had".¹⁰²

The attraction of Catholicism to the Cather of Red Cloud Baptist church is of course not unique. Eliot too was drawn to the richer cultural heritage of the Anglo-Catholic church from a background perhaps similar in Mid-Western St. Louis, and many other figures have moved backwards from the supreme-individualism of American Protestantism to the Church which embraces all aspects of life, sensuous, moral and intellectual, the body as well as the spirit.¹⁰³ In his Religious Background, Hall has observed that in the Middle Ages, the connection between aestheticism and Catholicism was natural for "the whole concept of culture, order, and intelligence was bound up with the Catholic tradition".¹⁰⁴

All of the most beautiful products of the culture alike of the Anglo-Saxon monastery and of France, which the Norman nobility brought with it, were bound up with the Catholic tradition. The music of the Mass; the sculptural beauty of the rising church buildings; the order and solemnity of the daily and weekly worship; all the classic traditions of Greece and Rome, together with the wealth of Roman literature; all the sacred memories of past heroes of the faith; the very dress of the clergy and the art of the missal and the mural paintings; all these things entered into the nobler spiritual and artistic life of every worshipper. . . . Separation from the Catholic tradition must have seemed to the

cultivated man a deliberate going out into outer darkness, a wilful rejection of all that made life beautiful and shed any light upon that unknown future that lay beyond the grave.¹⁰⁵

Most of these elements, the music of the mass, the dress of the clergy, the sculpture of the Cathedral, the murals and repeated ritual, are elements in the religious life of Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock; moreover they constitute almost the whole of this religious life, to give the novels the rich texture hailed even by Catholics such as Francis Connolly as conveying the very mood and tone of Catholicism itself.

As early as her trip to Europe in 1903, Cather felt this attraction in her contrast of London Protestantism, cold, dour and ugly, with Italian Catholicism, warm, full of beauty, colour and order, in the parade for the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel:

There was scarcely a window that had not a little shrine before it, with a tiny image and burning candles, carefully protected from the rain. The Italian quarter here is a poor place enough, and these attempts at ceremonial splendour in spite of time, absence, poverty, and distance, in spite of the oppressive grayness, in spite of the oppressively ugly city, were not a little pathetic. . . . Poor as the people are, nearly every window had a garland or bunch of cut flowers. . . . These poor Latins [were] undoubtedly trying to carry a little of the light and colour and sweet devotedness of a Latin land into their grey, cold London. . . . The tiniest child was able to abandon itself wholly to this beautiful experience they made for themselves in the heathen heart of London.¹⁰⁶

This contrast is born out by the early novels where the stereotypes again operate, and where again it is the predominantly the aestheticism of the Church which appeals to Cather. In O Pioneers! the preparations for the confirmation ceremonies coincide with Amédée's death and funeral: the choir rehearses the mass of Rossini, the boys and girls bring flowers, the women decorate the altar, and the remainder of the

town prepare the white dresses and veils for the confirmation ceremony or the funeral black for mourning.¹⁰⁷ The religious implications of Catholicism are not so clear-cut in The Song of the Lark, My Ántonia and One of Ours, although again it is the Catholic Mexicans, Bohemians and French who counter the sterility of American society in each case, with the richer culture, the love of life, beauty, art and music which for Cather is inseparable from their Catholic roots. While it is in the Methodist church window with its greens and reds and blues that Jim Burden finds the satisfaction of "a hunger for colour" almost physical like the Laplander's "craving for sugar and fats",¹⁰⁸ this is the only passage which attributes any beauty to Protestantism, and Claude finds a similar fulfilment in the church at Saint Ouen:

[He] saw far behind him, the rose window, with its purple heart. As he stood staring, hat in hand, as still as the stone figures in the chapels, a great bell, up aloft, began to strike the hour in its deep, melodious throat; eleven beats, measured and far apart, as rich as the colours in the window, then silence. . . only in his memory the throbbing of an undreamed-of quality of sound. The revelations of the glass and the bell had come almost simultaneously. . . superlatives toward which his mind had always been groping. . . [like] the stars whose light travels through space for hundreds of years before it reaches the earth and the human eye. The purple and crimson and peacock-green of this window had been shining quite as long as that before it got to him.¹⁰⁹

The attraction of this experience is explained by Professor St. Peter who, like his predecessors, sees Catholicism from the outside as an enriching of life through art and culture, ceremony and ritual, akin in its effect to drama:

As long as every man and woman who crowded into the Cathedrals on Easter Sunday was a principal in a gorgeous drama with God, glittering angels on one side and the shadows of evil coming and going on the other, life was a rich thing. The king and the beggar had the same chance at miracles and great temptations and revelations.

And that's what makes men happy, believing in the mystery and importance of their own little individual lives. It makes us happy to surround our creature needs and bodily instincts with as much pomp and circumstance as possible. Art and religion (they are the same thing in the end, of course) have given man the only happiness he has ever had.¹¹⁰

This statement then reveals Cather's fundamental assumptions with regard to religion. Like drama, it heightens our perception of life, exaggerates the contrast between light and dark, good and evil, and provides richness and colour in lives which are basically dreary. It simplifies issues which are complex in life, in the manner of the morality play, and it provides stability for our faith; we have no need to make perplexing decisions regarding shades of greyness or goodness. Thus it is more satisfying than life and, most important, it creates the illusion of significance for the individual. At this point Cather, like St. Peter, is an agnostic. For it does not matter whether religion represents the real nature of existence; that it seems to is quite sufficient.

My Mortal Enemy treats religion basically from the same angle.

Nellie Birdseye recalls the funeral of John Driscoll from the point of view of a six-year old who sees the Church ritual and order as transcending failure, pettiness, and even death:

The high altar blazed with hundreds of candles, the choir was entirely filled by the masses of flowers. The bishop was there, and a flock of priests in gorgeous vestments. When the pall-bearers arrived, Driscoll did not come to the church; the church went to him. The bishop and clergy went down the nave, . . . preceded by the cross and boys swinging cloudy censors, followed by the choir chanting to the organ. They surrounded, they received, they seemed to assimilate into the body of the church, the body of old John Driscoll. They bore it up to the high altar on a river of colour and incense and organ-tone. . . . I thought of John Driscoll as having escaped the end of all flesh. . . . From the freshness of roses and lilies, he had gone straight to the

greater glory, through smoking censors and candles and stars.¹¹¹

Despite the childish viewpoint, this is the vision of John Driscoll which remains, indeed the vision of the Catholic church in Cather's fiction. Although Nellie is grown when Myra Henshawe accepts Catholicism, we see little else of the Church except the ebony crucifix with the ivory Christ which Myra keeps in her hand and dies holding, and the candles which she has burning by her bed to recall the Church and replace the glare of modern electric light bulbs.¹¹²

Myra's absolution is achieved not through the last rites of the Church but through the pardoning of nature, which bends with the dawn to receive the sinner into its embrace like the religious houses of old.¹¹³

Yet to this point, Cather has treated Catholicism basically from the point-of-view of the outsider; the Protestants, Jim Burden, Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronberg, Claude Wheeler, Nellie Birdseye or the lapsed Catholic St. Peter. But when she moves into her religious novels Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, she approaches it now from the inside; now her protagonists themselves are Catholic. And here Cather fails in convincing for she seeks in Catholicism something which is not really there. Her emphasis upon aestheticism remains and here it becomes a substitute for religious experience itself. Basic to the conception of Death Comes for the Archbishop was Cather's fascination with the old mission churches of the Southwest with their "moving reality"; "the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling".¹¹⁴ The

replacement of these old images and decorations by factory-made items from Ohio which have no such "definite artistic and historic value" Cather castigates bitterly. Yet the intention of religious art is not primarily aesthetic but religious, and Geddes MacGregor in Aesthetic Experience in Religion points out the difference between art per se and art as religious symbol:

To those who enjoy such a religious consciousness, it [religious art] has a value other than that which it has for the art connoisseur as such. So we expect every cultured person to value Raphael's Madonna, if not El Greco's Agony in the Garden; but the religious person, as such, however cultured, does not value them very much more than most inferior works of a similar kind; for he is looking not for aesthetic experience simpliciter, but for the initiation of a trend of experience leading towards union with God. A rude crucifix, and particularly one that we can believe to have been clasped by the dying Saint Francis of Assissi, or perhaps, better, fashioned by the saint, would plainly be more efficient as a "holy thing" than any Raphael or Velasque.¹¹⁵

As religious symbols, machine-made crosses from Ohio, and even machine-made Madonnas, are of equal value. But Cather is not primarily concerned with religious value in Death Comes for the Archbishop. Its central symbol is the building of the Cathedral, but while Father Vaillant is concerned not with the structure in itself but with what it points to beyond--"whether it was Midi Romanesque or Ohio German in style, seemed to him of little consequence"¹¹⁶--the concern of Latour, the central figure of the novel, for its architecture is definitely secular: "It would be a shame to any man coming from a Seminary that is one of the architectural treasures of France, to make another ugly church on this continent where there are so many already".¹¹⁷ The mission bell, a product of Moorish tradition passed on to Mexico through the Spaniards, is of value to Latour because of

its aesthetic characteristics, its silver tone and its transfer of culture from the exotic world of the East to the new frontier. The art of the Mexicans is centered on the decoration of the church and the priest, and the images of the Holy Family, and ultimately Padre Martínez, a licentious priest of scandalous reputation, is allowed to continue temporarily because the Bishop is pleased with his church: "The building was clean and in good repair, the congregation large and devout. The delicate lace, snowy linen, the burnished brass on the altar told of a devoted Altar Guild," and Latour compliments Martínez's baritone: "The Bishop had never heard the Mass more impressively sung".¹⁷⁸ Even the Cardinal in Rome, Marcia de Allande, is more interested in aesthetics and his family collection of art than in religion and the missions of the New World, as illustrated by his story of the Indian missionary who approached his grandfather:

All missionaries from the Americas were inveterate beggars, then as now. . . . He wheedled a good sum of money out of the old man, as well as vestments and linens and chalices--he would take anything--and he implored my grandfather to give him a painting for his great collection, for the ornamentation of his mission church among the Indians. . . . The hairy Franciscan pounced upon one of the best in the collection; a young St. Francis in meditation, by El Greco. . . . My grandfather protested; tried to persuade the fellow that some picture of the Crucifixion, or a martyrdom, would appeal more strongly to his redskins. . . . [The mission at Cia was destroyed but the painting] may still be hidden away in some crumbling sacristy or smoky wigwam. If your French priest had a discerning eye, now, and were sent to this Vicarate, he might keep my El Greco in mind.¹⁷⁹

Shadows on the Rock is much less concerned with Church art, yet here too it is largely an aesthetic appeal which marks religion, and here, the appeal of the art is determined by the child heroine. Thus the works described are the statues of the Holy Family, the

child bright and joyful, the mother "by far the loveliest of all the Virgins in Kebec",¹²⁰ of Sainte Genevieve watching her sheep, or Sainte Anne holding the Virgin as a child. And the children light candles because "it was pleasanter, they agreed, when there was enough candles burning before Sainte Anne to show the gold flowers of her cloak".¹²¹ Although Cécile devotedly attends divine service, we are told little of the ritual except on the Christmas eve where the priest sings the Mass and the Monseigneur wears his aube of rich lace, for both Bishop Laval and his successor agree "the services of the church should be performed in Quebec as elaborately, as splendidly, as anywhere else in the world. For many years, Bishop Laval had kept himself miserably poor to make the altar and the sacristy rich".¹²² But despite the relative unimportance of church art in the novel, its place is taken not by religious theology or even by a moral struggle, but by the efforts of the Auclair family to preserve the flame of French culture in the New World, primarily in the form of the salon and secondarily in the ritual of the church.

Lucy Gayheart and Sapphira and the Slave Girl move away from the Catholic church and its aesthetics, but Cather's continuing absorption with Church art is evident in the final novel of Avignon which she left unfinished at her death and which was destroyed by her wishes. George N. Kates has reconstructed the progress of this novel from Miss Lewis' comments in her Willa Cather Living, from her memories, and from Thomas Okey's history of Avignon which Cather had used, underlining passages doubly and triply and commenting in the margins or in a key at the end of the book.¹²³ Miss Lewis indicates

that Cather was affected in particular by the papal palace at Avignon, which stirred her "as no other building had ever done". She tells us that one day in 1935:

We wandered through the great chambers of a white, almost translucent stone, alone except for a guide; this young fellow suddenly stopped still in one of the rooms and began to sing, with a beautiful voice. It echoed down the corridors and under the arched ceilings like a great bell sounding--but sounding from some remote past; its vibrations seemed laden, weighted down with the passions of another age.¹²⁴

According to Miss Lewis, the novel was to be démeublé again, with almost no description except two or three paragraphs on the palace, in particular the roasting kitchen: "No costumes, No functions".¹²⁵ Yet the passages which Cather has doubly underlined in Okey suggest her interest in the palace gardens, its clipped hedges, avenues of trees and flower-beds watered by channels, in the dressing of the pope for a state dinner and in his chamber hung with rich tapestries, carpeted in velvet of triple pile, and housing a bed "draped with fine crimson velvet, lined with white ermine; the sheets of silk were embroidered with silver and gold".¹²⁶ She underlined too the description of the papal utensils; "jewelled cups, flagons of gold, knife handles of jasper and ivory, forks of mother-of-pearl and gold", the chests and cupboards for the pope's silver vessels and a "pontifical bell, which from its silvery tone was known as the cloche d'argent".¹²⁷ And she notes the State dinner of twenty-seven dishes, nine courses of three plates each, followed by music and dessert chosen from two trees, the silver one bearing rare fruit and the other, sugared fruit.¹²⁸ Clearly Cather's interests have not really altered with Sapphira and the Slave-Girl and Kates notes finally "Religion, in this papal setting,

seems also neither more nor less present than it has been for some time".¹²⁹

That Cather should have been attracted to the aestheticism of the Catholic Church is perhaps natural, for she saw the world through art. In an early article in the Journal 1894, she indicated this attitude in her description of God Himself as the Supreme Artist, the magnification of all earthly artists where the religious-oriented author would have seen the artist as an imitator of God:

It is peculiar, this idea people have of everything colorless and spiritless being sacred. It is strange how we object to giving beautiful things to God. He must be very fond of beauty Himself. He never made an unlovely thing any more than he ever made a "moral" thing. In nature God does not teach morals. He never limits or interferes with beauty. His laws are the laws of beauty and all the natural forces work together to produce it. The nightingale's song is not moral; it is perfectly pagan in its unrestrained passion. . . . The world was made by an Artist, by the divinity and god-head of art, an Artist of such insatiate love of beauty that He takes all forces, all space, all time to fill them with His universes of beauty; an Artist whose dreams are so intense and real that they, too, love and suffer and have dreams of their own. . . this Painter, this Poet, this Musician, this gigantic Artist of all art that is, this God whose spirit moved upon chaos leaving beauty incarnate in its shadow.¹³⁰

In The Professor's House, the Professor sees the Virgin as a Poet because she "sat down and composed the Magnificat!"¹³¹ and in Death Comes for the Archbishop she appears to the missionary priest Juan Diego and paints herself in blue and gold and rose on the coarse material of his mantle.¹³² Even in her religious novels, Cather's viewpoint is consistently that of the artist and not of the theologian. As Zabel notes, her concept of the Catholic Church is unreal, an abstract "cultural symbol, not a human or historical actuality,"¹³³ and Trilling comments that she turns to "a Catholicism of culture,

not of doctrine. . . . She attaches a mystical significance to the ritual of the ordered life, to the niceties of cookery, to the supernatural virtues of things themselves".¹³⁴ In her merging of the Church and the salon, Cather has sacrificed the basic reality of religious experience, the conflict of good and evil, for an aestheticism illusory and ultimately barren. After Quebec, what? She returns temporarily to the present, the Protestant, the empty, before her final embracing of the Church and the past in Avignon itself.

5. The Saint as Hero

While we may find in literature a stereotype of the pioneer and a stereotype of the artist, the figure of the religieux is more difficult for there seems to be no pattern or defined characterization. Presumably the Christian religious figure corresponds to the ideal of the true Christian which the handbook of Catholicism defines:

Grace restores to man the power to live fully, and it is in the growth toward perfect love that the ideal of the Christian is found. To love God and other men in God is the vocation whose fulfillment brings nature and supernature to perfect fruition. In this love all other goods find meaning. . . . The commandment to love is the highest counsel of Christ's legacy, and, as we shall see, it is in Christ Himself that the supreme example of such love is found. This love is the total personal adherence to the good of another and total dedication to the preservation and increase of this good. . . . The love of God, as Christ exemplified it, is expressed in the fulfillment of the divine image in man. Love is the Incarnation renewed in each person.¹³⁵

The author continues:

The perfection of man can only be found in the imitation of the most perfect man, the God-Man. . . . In Christ it finds the perfect model. . . . The virtues of Christ are the measure of a man's perfection, the sacrifice of Christ the measure of man's love. . . a man's worth is measured only by the extent to which he is willing to "leave all things" and "Come, follow Me".¹³⁶

In this sense, Christian love denies rank, dignity, pleasure, ceremony and pomp, political ambition, pride, and confidence in reason, and brings a recognition of misery, poverty, destitution, oppression, captivity: "Consider pain and suffering, diseases long or violent, all that is frightening and revolting",¹³⁷ and take the Cross as the centre of Christian life.

Despite his lust and carnal sin, Graham Greene's little whiskey priest in The Power and the Glory is thus a true Christian, indeed a truer Christian since his own sin than in his previous pride. Humble, contrite, self-sacrificing, loving, he follows Christ as truly as he is able under the present situation in Mexico and takes up His cross. Morley Callaghan's Father Dowling who loses his sanity in attempting to rescue from sin two prostitutes, his Kip Caley, an ex-criminal who attempts to make for himself a new life and is not given a chance by society, E.J. Pratt's "Brébeuf and his Brethren"; these exemplify too love, self-sacrifice, humility and dedication, as do ultimately Hawthorne's Dimmesdale and Melville's Billy Budd.

Yet these are not the central characteristics of Cather's saints. Kazin points out the basic similarity of Cather's heroes: "She did not celebrate the pioneer as such; she sought his image in all creative spirits--explorers and artists, lovers and saints, who seemed to live by a purity of aspiration that represented everything that had gone out of life or had to fight a losing battle for survival in it".¹³⁸ These qualities which she idealizes are the basic qualities of the frontier: self-sufficiency, ardour, resolution, optimism, individualism, courage, physical endurance and that dream which

inspires the mind of pioneer and artist: "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves".¹³⁹ Yet certain characteristics have been discarded: a concern for innovation rather than for tradition and authority. Certainly her saints resemble more closely her pioneers such as Alexandra and her artists such as Thea than the accepted saintly ideals of the Church. Myra Henshawe, the priest Father Fay describes as: "I wonder whether some of the saints of the early Church weren't a great deal like her. She's not at all modern in her make-up, is she?",¹⁴⁰ yet Nellie has just previously described Myra as "strong and broken, generous and tyrannical, a witty and rather wicked old woman, who hated life for its defeats, and loved it for its absurdities".¹⁴¹ Old Bishop Laval Cather describes as "a stubborn, high-handed, tyrannical, quarrelsome, old man", although she adds that "no one could deny that he shepherded his sheep".¹⁴² And she presents him as living in "naked poverty", sacrificing his riches and linens, silver and velvets for needy parishioners and his revenues and lands to the Church,¹⁴³ in contrast to the current opinion of Laval as expressed by Parkman:

He thought himself above human law. In vindicating the rights of the Church, he invaded the rights of others and used means from which a healthy conscience would have shrunk. . . . He was penetrated by the poisonous casuistry of the Jesuits based on the assumption that all means are permitted when the end is the service of God; and . . . Laval, in his own opinion, was always doing the service of God.¹⁴⁴

Cather finds Laval right in insisting upon the splendid observance of Church ceremony, right in demanding that parish clergy should remain in the community of his seminary, and right in intervening in civil

matters for moral and spiritual reasons; as Brown says, "he is presented as precisely the leader the New World required".¹⁴⁵ And Cather's final novel, centred in Avignon, shows her continuing concern for such a tyrannic religious figure of authority, in her marking of the passage in Okey's history describing Bernard XII as "hard, obstinate, avaricious; he loved the good overmuch and hated the bad; he was remiss in granting favours".¹⁴⁶

The centre figure of Death Comes for the Archbishop, Jean Marie Latour, does not appear autocratic. Nevertheless the community always conforms to his plans; he decides the location, stone, design and builders for the Cathedral, plans the community, quietly removes from office all troublesome native priests. He too has few of the positive characteristics of the saint although he has the courage, the physical and mental endurance, and the latent authority which Cather admires in all her heroes. Although she describes him in the beginning as "brave, sensitive, courteous", compassionate for his animals and for the illiterate Indians and Mexicans around him,¹⁴⁷ he is more notable for his pride, his position and his self-concern than for humility and poverty. In effect, Cather depicts him as the gentleman artist; his love of God is evidenced only in the opening section where he kneels before the cruciform tree, and his love of his fellow men is largely a result of the removal of all interference by the omniscient narrator. Thus his acceptance of all forms of religious belief, all manners and all men, is not so much true breadth as lack of depth in his portrayal, and if he is not like Bishop Laval, it is only because the situation in New Mexico does not demand stern measures.

Unique in his own way, Cather's only Protestant "saint", Crazy Ivar, is an eccentric old man who has rejected society to live in a clay bank and to act as veterinarian to "God's creatures".¹⁴⁸ Here he spends his days reading the Bible which "seemed truer to him there", and according to a local tale he "runs about the country howling at night because he is afraid the Lord will destroy him".¹⁴⁹ When he loses his land, he moves to Alexandra's but chooses to live in the barn near the horses "further from temptation".¹⁵⁰ He always goes bare-footed because:

The hands, the tongue, the eyes, the heart, all bodily desires we are commanded to subdue; but the feet are free members. I indulge them without harm to anyone, even to trampling in filth when my desires are low. They are quickly cleaned again.¹⁵¹

Yet no one knows what his temptations are,¹⁵² and Ivar is ridiculed by a society which has no patience for differences. He says to Alexandra:

You know that my spells come from God, and that I would not harm any living creature. You believe that every one should worship God in the way revealed to him. But that is not the way of this country. The way here is for all to do alike. I am despised because I do not wear shoes, because I do not cut my hair, and because I have visions. At home, in the old country, there were many like me, who had been touched by God, or who had seen things in the graveyard at night and were different afterward. We thought nothing of it, and let them alone. But here, if a man is different in his feet or in his head, they put him in the asylum.¹⁵³

Ivar appears only occasionally in the novel yet it is he who discovers the bodies of Emil and Marie and laments "Sin and death for the young ones! God have mercy upon us!". And he too believes that Alexandra will draw comfort from the grave "When the eyes of the flesh are shut, the eyes of the spirit are open",¹⁵⁴ although his uncompromising faith will not allow with Alexandra that they may be in Heaven.

Yet Cather does include certain portraits of more conventional

saints, in particular Father Vaillant who is "like the saints of the early Church, literally without personal possessions", and again "scarcely acquisitive to the point of decency".¹⁵⁵ Vaillant is an aimable little man, fond of companionship, without the pride of Latour and without "vanity about grammar or refinement of phrase. To communicate with peons, he was quite willing to speak like a peon".¹⁵⁶ It is Vaillant who attempts to persuade Latour why he is more interested in missions than remaining in Santa Fé:

To hunt for lost Catholics, Jean! Utterly lost Catholics. . . full of devotion and faith, and it has nothing to feed upon but the most mistaken superstitions. They remember their prayers all wrong. They cannot read. . . . I desire to be the man who restores these lost children to God. It will be the greatest happiness of my life.¹⁵⁷

Yet Cather deliberately underplays Vaillant, minimizing his real role as builder of one hundred and four churches, director of education for sixty-four priests and three thousand children, Vicar of Colorado and Utah and first Bishop of Denver.¹⁵⁸ Where we do see Vaillant, with the exception of the May devotions to Mary, he is making soup, complaining about lack of greens for salads and the scarcity of good wine or bullying a rich Catholic rancher out of his prize pair of white mules. His mission background is developed only through summarized narrative, much of it primarily concerned with his conquering of the physical barriers of "mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers",¹⁵⁹ of accidents and disease and death to carry out his mission or ultimately with the evidence of his popularity at his funeral. The portraits of Vaillant and Latour are supplemented by the missionary to Rome from "the icy

arms of the Great Lakes"¹⁶⁰ who explains that the new priest to New Mexico must face thirst and massacres, the challenge of the desert itself, thirty Indian nations, with "savagery and ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigues".¹⁶¹ And there are the child-like Padre Jesus and the priests Father Junipero and Juan Diego who appear only in narratives. The positive qualities of Latour and Vaillant as saints are presented mainly through negation, in contrast to the worldliness of Padre Gallegos, the sensuality of Martínez and Trinidad, the avarice of Lucero, and the gluttony of the legendary Fray Baltazaar.

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the New World saints like Vaillant are heroic chiefly through physical endurance. As Latour meditates of the early Spanish missionaries:

They came into a hostile country, carrying little provisionment but their breviary and crucifix. When their mules were stolen by Indians, as often happened, they proceeded on foot, without a change of raiment, without food or water. A European could scarcely imagine such hardships. . . . Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants. They thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks, climbed up and down its terrible canyons on stone-bruised feet, broke long fasts by unclean and repugnant food. Surely these endured Hunger, Thirst, Cold, Nakedness, of a kind beyond any conception St. Paul and his bretheren could have had. Whatever the early Christians suffered, it all happened in that safe little Mediterranean World, amid the old manners, the old landmarks.¹⁶²

Likewise Cécile in Shadows on the Rock admires the New World martyrs largely for their courage and for the wonder and terror of their romantic associations: "To be thrown into the Rhone or the Moselle, to be decapitated at Lyon,--what was that to the tortures the Jesuit missionaries endured at the hands of the Iroquois, in those savage,

interminable forests?"¹⁶³ While Father Hector avows "Nothing worth while is accomplished except by that last sacrifice, the giving of oneself altogether and finally",¹⁶⁴ his challenge is largely physical, hunger and dirt, solitude, loneliness and isolation. Noel Chabanel is unable to learn the Huron language or communicate with the Indians, is nauseated by the vermin, the mosquitoes, the smell of unwashed bodies and the food of boiled dogs' flesh, by a life without beauty or order, as well as by his inability to pray: "his martyrdom was his life, not his death".¹⁶⁵ Yet while E.J. Pratt treats these same tales, and documents the same physical sufferings and indignities, he places the emphasis upon the spiritual dedication of the Priests and their ultimate belief in their mission despite the martyrdoms of those who have gone before. Compare Brébeuf's dedication to the vows of Ignatius: "I shall be broken first before I break them":

This is the end of man--Deum laudet
 To seek and find the will of God, to act
 Upon it for the ordering of life,
 And for the soul's beatitude. This is
 To do, this not to do. To weigh the sin;
 The interior understanding to be followed
 By the amendment of the deed through grace;
 The abnegation of the evil thought
 And act; the trampling of the body under;
 The daily practise of the counter virtues.
"In time of desolation to be firm
And constant in the soul's determination
Desire and sense obedient to the reason".¹⁶⁶

And Brébeuf's decision, despite suffering from the smoke of the wigwams, the food from unwashed plates, the howling of dogs and squaws and children, the vicious stings of fleas, is:

You must sincerely love the savages
As brothers ransomed by the blood of Christ.
All things must be endured. To win their hearts
You must perform the smallest services.¹⁶⁷

For Pratt's Brébeuf preaches love, humility and self-sacrifice, as Cather's priests never do. And although Father Hector suggests "the giving of oneself altogether and finally",¹⁶⁸ the validity of this whole sacrifice is questioned by Auclair's belief that there had been "a good deal of misplaced heroism in the Canadian missions,-- a waste of rare qualities that did nobody any good",¹⁶⁹ and by the whole experience of Jeanne Le Ber who has entombed herself in a cloister and has suffered every sorrow and every despair, who calls out to the anonymous sinner in the Church "God have mercy upon you! I will pray for you. And do you pray for me also".¹⁷⁰

Cather's idea of the saint does not then correspond to the usual stereotype of the religious figure, meek, mild, loving and full of humility and pious resignation, as does for example Graham Greene's odd little priest, the nameless Father of The Power and the Glory. She seeks the hero, and her ideal of heroism is more conventional than Greene's; "Blessed are the meek" is a creed which she with Claude Wheeler finds totally unacceptable. Her ideal saint resembles closely her ideal pioneer, and her ideal artist, a man dedicated to an ideal, courageous, sensitive, capable of physical endurance and mental torture and able to challenge the world which opposes these ideals, whether it be the world of geography and the elements, the world of the barbarian or of the philistine. And in her ideal of the saint, Cather reveals the nature of her other religious quest for value in the twentieth century: a quest not essentially Christian or Catholic but aesthetic and philosophical, for something which will recreate the meaning of life which she felt to have been lost with

the sunset of the pioneer.¹⁷¹

5. Religion as Escape:

The role of the Church as refuge from the life of modern twentieth century America is not new to Willa Cather but it has little significance in her fiction up to The Professor's House. Yet it appears as early as Cather's trip to Europe in 1903, in her description of Chester Cathedral as a sanctuary in the middle ages from the oppression and struggle of everyday life, of mediaeval politics and even existence itself:

The cloister is perhaps the most beautiful part of the building to one who has never lived in a Catholic country. Its utter peacefulness in the afternoons I spent there, the Norman wall with its half-effaced designs, on which the eyes of faith gaze in bland astonishment after a thousand years, the rain that fell so quietly or the sun that shone so remotely into the green court in the centre, with its old, thick, sod, its pear-tree and its fleur-de-lis--they made the desirableness of the cloister in the stormy years seem not impossible. Without, Norman and Saxon butchered each other, and poachers were flayed alive, and forests planted over the ruins of freeholders' homesteads; but within the cloister the garden court was green, the ale went to the abbot's cellar and venison to his table, and though kings were slain and communities wiped out, the order of prayers and offices and penances were never broken.¹⁷²

Although the old world is here the villain, born in chaos and struggle, as against the Edenic innocence of the New, we see the cycle which for Cather recurs throughout history, the destruction of grace and culture by the barbarians. Yet the Church is a symbol of this past world, preserving inviolate into the present its past and its culture in the form of the cultivated garden. Alexander Bergson, Thea Kronberg and Jim Burden view religion, when they view it at all, as a negative power encroaching upon creativity, a force which has

shaped the narrow morality and materialism of small-town America. Yet in O Pioneers! there is the first foreshadowing of the church as refuge in the description of Amédée's death: "They could not doubt that the invisible arm was still about Amédée; that through the church on earth he had passed to the church triumphant"¹⁷³ and in Marie's devotion to her faith during the winter of Emil's absence: "She found more comfort in her Church that winter than ever before. It seemed to come closer to her, and to fill an emptiness that ached in her heart".¹⁷⁴ Yet these statements are natural and in context not at all exceptional. It is only after 1926 that Cather turns to the Catholic church in an attempt to face a life increasingly alien to her.

In The Professor's House it is only Augusta and "the bloomless side of life" which convinces St. Peter that he must go on living. Its comfort is negative and static; suffering and death are necessary but essentially meaningless. But in My Mortal Enemy Cather truly begins her search for the end of yearning and desire, for sanctuary in the Catholicism of the past, the preserver of beauty and culture and the old forms of life which modern industrial society has renounced. To Cather Catholicism preserves without struggle or moral conflict; as Myra Henshawe observes: "in religion, desire was fulfillment, it was the seeking itself that rewarded".¹⁷⁵ But while Myra and the Professor have suffered, albeit as a result of their own actions or attitudes, in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock there is no pain or suffering, no renunciation, even no real experience of life. Religion has become a refuge from an existence

which has never been experienced except perhaps vicariously. When Latour suggests that Magdalena should leave the shelter of the Convent to marry and return to the world, Vaillant protests "No, no! She has had enough of the storms of this world, Here she is safe and happy".¹⁷⁶ And Jeanne Le Ber, the recluse, even rejects the request of her confessor that she walk in the cloister grounds for air and exercise: "Ah, mon père, ma chambre est mon paradis terrestre; c'est mon centre; c'est mon élément. . . . Je préfère ma cellule à tout le reste de l'univers".¹⁷⁷

While neither the Archbishop nor Cécile rejects life for the stability of an ordered ritual existence, nevertheless the Church provides them with sanctuary. Neither face real moral dilemmas. Their religion is straightforward, unequivocal, even childlike. Contradictions are not resolved; they are simply dismissed, as in the Bishop's position in regard to the native Indian religion or to the incumbent padres Martínez or Lucero, in Vaillant's and Auclair's question as to the real value of cultural sacrifice in the missions, or Cécile's disregard of the Harnois' values or Jacques' position as son of the town prostitute. All will be well, for the Church reconciles all opposites and solves all difficulties. Ultimately Cather comes to see sanctuary as the central symbol which unites all human religions:

These Indians, born in fear and dying by violence for generations, had at last taken this leap away from earth, and on that rock had found the hope of all suffering and tormented creatures--safety. . . . Sanctuary! . . . The rock, when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; The Hebrews of the Old Testament, always being carried captive into foreign lands,--their rock was an idea of God, the only thing their conquerors could

not take from them. . . . The Ácomas, who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change,--they had their idea in substance. They actually lived upon their Rock; were born upon it and died upon it.¹⁷⁸

In Shadows on the Rock, the whole of Quebec is a fortress against the wilderness, the savages, the predators, artificial like the scenes of the Nativity with the Chateau and the convents at the top of the headland. The Church of Notre Dame de la Victoire suggests a "fortress" with its high narrow windows; it provides shelter from the cold and wind outside, and from the noise and lights of the market-place.¹⁷⁹ Even Heaven appears in terms of a fortress, in the painting admired by Cécile and Jacques, of a feudal castle with stone walls, towers and many battlements: "It was very comforting to them both to know just what heaven looked like,--strong and unassailable, wherever it was set among the stars".¹⁸⁰

Thus ultimately to Cather, the function of religion is to satisfy this yearning for security, for changelessness, and the Catholic church with its roots in the historic past, its tradition and ritual and cultural richness, fulfills this need more fully than any other. Yet here, too, Cather comes to a dead end; for the serene optimism and cold security lead nowhere. The denial of all struggle and conflict is in effect literary suicide, and in her last novels Lucy Gayheart and Sapphira and the Slave-Girl, Cather turns away from the Catholic church, and back to the struggle of life and the necessity of affirmation of conflict in human existence.

12. MY MORTAL ENEMY.

My Mortal Enemy, following directly The Professor's House, is in many ways the most surprising and perhaps inexplicable of Cather's works. Yet it stands between The Professor's House and Death Comes for the Archbishop not only in chronological order but in theme, although it differs from both in technique. Marcus Klein notes that it marks the point of crisis in Cather's work; this crisis he finds in human relationships, for Myra Henshawe is, in a sense, a Professor St. Peter stripped of the money and the success which make life bearable for him.¹ The bitterness, the intensely personal tone Klein attributes to an unrecorded experience of Cather herself.² But the novel marks no less a crisis between Cather's two orders of art and religion. Unlike the Professor, Myra is forced to renounce the world of art for economic reasons resulting from her original choice of love over wealth; the first section deals with this life of art, the second with the life of religion which is an inadequate but necessary substitute. Thus it is within this work that Cather finally denies the order of art as a centre of life and turns to religion to seek meaning and order: "in religion, seeking is finding" (94).³

In its structure, My Mortal Enemy is skilful and richly allusive, the true novel *démeublé*.⁴ As in A Lost Lady, the two sections are perfectly balanced in incident, character and symbol. The admiring circle of artists is replaced by the long-dead poets which Myra recites to herself at night, the friends by "those animals"

(66) above. The salon in part I is partially recreated in Part II, although the change of atmosphere is marked. Oswald's woman of the topaz cuff-links is replaced by the young girl reporter, and the religion of John Driscoll by the new devotion to the Church of Myra. The three central characters, the narrator Nellie, Myra and Oswald are constant, and John Driscoll, a vital force in the action, is recreated in Myra's memory. But there are several problems. As a narrator, Nellie Birdseye is no more than that, an eye to observe and report. She never successfully comes alive and there is no need to question as in the case of Neil Herbert whether we see the real Myra or the Myra distorted by the mind of the narrator.⁵ Although the contrast between the early Myra and the later Myra is central, this cannot be simply attributed to the adolescent naivety of Nellie. And Cather uses the guise of this naivety to evade certain questions which arise and which are basic to the meaning of the whole work.⁶ The portrait of Marian Forrester is complete insofar as it goes; that of Myra is partial, and does not unlock the mystery of her personality. Van Ghent suggests that, for all its effectiveness, the novel is puzzling and vaguely dissatisfying, as if there are certain incidents missing.⁷ And Kronenberger suggests that this is attributable to "the dangerous method of having what is left out count for more than what is put in; . . . the book implies so much that its meaning comes to little."⁸ The appearance of a second Cather-figure in the naive girl journalist of Part II is confusing and unnecessary, detracting from the real focus of the action.⁹ Yet Van Ghent claims that it is the mystery and the intangible forces of the novel which provide the fas-

cination, the strain of dark primitivism which would be lost in a detailed elucidation.¹⁰

The centre of the novel, and that which determines the movement from art to religion, is the love-hate relationship of Myra and Oswald Henshawe. The love affair is fated from the beginning of the novel to end in tragedy: "the very point of their story was that they should be much happier than other people" (17). While love is temporary, hate is enduring and lasts beyond death. Myra has renounced the world of culture in which she was raised, to marry Oswald Henshawe: "I went before a justice of the peace, and married without gloves, so to speak!" (85). The greater the renunciation, the greater should be the reward. Yet it is clear from the beginning that the love is greatly weakened, in Myra's comments on love: "Love itself draws on a woman nearly all the bad luck in the world; why, for mercy's sake, add opals?" (28), and later:

You send a handsome fellow like Ewan Grey to a fine girl like Esther, and it's Christmas eve, and they rise above us and the white world around us, and there isn't anybody, not a tramp on the park benches, that wouldn't wish them well--and very likely hell will come of it! (31)

For love is subject to time; hatred is not. John Driscoll's revenge upon his niece for defying his will lasts beyond his death to the death of Myra herself; he has given his money and property to the Catholic Church, to found a Convent and an aged women's home in which Myra may be received without charge at any time and given an allowance of ten dollars a week for the remainder of her life (81). And John Driscoll triumphs, for Myra's love turns to hatred of her bondage. As she tells Nellie in Part I; "It's all very well to tell us to for-

give our enemies; our enemies can never hurt us very much. But oh, what about forgiving our friends?" (44). This reference, here to a man who has hurt Oswald in the past, becomes more personal in Part II in Myra's admission that she has destroyed Oswald's faith and sentimentalism:

People can be lovers and enemies at the same time, you know. We were. . . . A man and woman draw apart from that long embrace, and see what they have done to one another. Perhaps I can't forgive him for the harm I did him. . . . In age we lose everything; even the power to love. (88-9)

When Oswald helps her in any way or does her any service, she cringes: "It's bitter enough that I should have to take service from you--you whom I have loved so well" (92), and ultimately she asks the final question: "Why must I die like this, alone with my mortal enemy?" (95).¹¹

As Sergeant indicates, The Professor's House and My Mortal Enemy share with Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock a concern for the religious: "They seek the decisions of the world and the spirit on man's tragic fate".¹² And Marcus Klein observes: "After My Ántonia, there is a gathering darkness of which My Mortal Enemy is the crisis, and in each of these novels between these two the enemy is, successfully, a more intimate part of the hero".¹³ It is in the combination of these, the replacement of love by hatred, the dedication to art by dedication to religion, that My Mortal Enemy faces, and fails to successfully resolve, Cather's own personal crisis.

The personality of Myra is central to the novel, and her movement away from art and towards religion is marked, paradoxically by a movement away from love and towards hatred.¹⁴ In Part I she is presented as an artist like Marian Forrester, the centre of the salon.

She makes a salad dressing (9) and sends to Madame Modjeska a box of cookies "of my baking" (30), but she is more truly an artist of personality. Her voice is "charming, fluent" (7), often "bright and gay and carelessly kind" (6), her laugh marked by "a spark of zest and wild humour" (10), her eyes deep-set and flashing (6). She has the ability to evoke a response in others; "Her account of her friends was often more interesting to me than the people themselves" (40).

I saw that her chief extravagance was in caring for so many people and in caring for them so much. When she but mentioned the name of someone whom she admired, one got an instant impression that the person must be wonderful, her voice invested the name with a sort of grace. . . . When she addressed Aunt Lydia, for instance, she seemed to be speaking to a person deeper down than the blurred, taken-for-granted image of my aunt that I saw every day. . . . Her manner of addressing my relatives had made them all seem a little more attractive to me. (43)

Her hands are beautiful, flexible, even at the end "white and well-cared for" (63-4), and Nellie describes them as "long, beautifully modelled hands, with so much humanity in them. They were worldly indeed, but fashioned for a nobler worldliness than ours; hands to hold a sceptre, or a chalice--or, by courtesy, a sword" (46).

Myra has the potentiality, then, to be a ruler or a priest. She has too the vitality of the artist, and the desire to live above all, even in the midst of her problems: "I've no patience with young people when they drift. I wish I could live their lives for them: I'd know how!" (64). Yet with the qualities of the dove, she combines those of the snake (35, 54) even in Part I. Her sarcasm is biting, like metal so cold that it burns (7), and she has an "angry laugh" which causes Nellie to shiver as she remembers it (10). She is able to overpower the young girl, to make her feel "stupid, hope-

lessly clumsy and stupid" (6), in contrast to Oswald who "did not frighten one so much" (10). The total effect of these becomes evident one day, when Nellie arrives for lunch to overhear Myra's "angry laugh, and a burst of rapid words that stung like cold water from a spray" (49). And she finds the atmosphere of the salon totally changed:

Everything was in ruins. The air was still and cold like the air in a refrigerating-room. What I felt was fear; I was afraid to look or speak or move. Everything about me seemed evil. When kindness has left people. . . left a place where we have always found it, it is like a shipwreck; we drop from security to something malevolent and bottomless. (51)

In contrast to the "poison" of the air, the city seems "safe and friendly and smiling" (51). The final incident in Part I occurs when Myra meets Nellie and her aunt on the train, and indicates that she has known of their deception to protect Oswald and the lady who gave him the cuff-links: "[Her mouth] seemed to curl and twist about like a little snake. Letting herself think harm of anyone she loved seemed to change her nature, even her features" (54).

In Part II, the dove has disappeared and she has developed into the full "tyrant" (89). Her artistic qualities are now negative. Her extreme sensitivity makes her "unable to bear things", in particular the noise of tramping and shutting doors above, which brings to her face an expression of torture, apprehension and helplessness (66). Yet she has still "enough desperate courage for a regiment" (76), as Oswald asserts. Although crippled, she holds power over all around her, to help or destroy: "She looked strong and broken, generous and tyrannical, a witty and rather wicked old woman, who hated life for its defeats, and loved it for its absurdities" (65). Oswald tells

Nellie that she has locked him out for days at a time: "It seems strange--a woman of such generous friendships. It's as if she had used up that part of herself" (76). Yet it is this woman of whom Father Faye says "She's a most unusual woman, Mrs. Henshawe. . . .

I wonder whether some of the saints of the early Church weren't a good deal like her. She's not at all modern in her make-up, is she?" (93).

What Cather really intends here is not at all clear. Myra herself admits that Oswald has been sentimental in treasuring the days of their youth: "I was always a grasping, worldly woman; I was never satisfied" (88). She comes into her inheritance; for while she has lost John Driscoll's estate, she has preserved his passions:

He had violent prejudices; but that's rather good to remember in these days when so few people have any real passions, either of love or hate. He would help a friend, no matter what it cost him, and over and over again he risked ruining himself to crush an enemy. But he never did ruin himself. Men who hate like that usually have the fist-power to back it up. . . . We were very proud of each other, and if he'd lived till now, I'd go back to him and ask his pardon; because I know what it is to be old and lonely and disappointed. (81-2)

And ultimately she rejects first Nellie--"She was smiling, but her mouth curled like a little snake. . . . 'Will you be pleased to take your things and go, Mrs. Casey?'" (89)--and then Oswald, the object of her idolatry.

The reasons for rejection are obscure. While she blames Oswald for taking her away from the life of art and culture, even the Church which she has loved, this does not seem to answer the problem. From the beginning there are indications that Oswald would be, in a different environment, a typical Cather pioneer. Nellie suggests that his qualities are suitable for a soldier or a pioneer. His forehead is broad

and rugged, his cheekbones high, his nose slightly arched, the whole suggesting "a military air" (8). Like Captain Forrester he suggests "a personal bravery, magnanimity, and a fine, generous way of doing things" (8), yet his eyes are languid, lacking fire, without correspondence to his strong bones. The result is a "perplexing combination of something hard and something soft" (10). Nellie sums up her impression: "I felt that his life had not suited him; that he possessed some kind of courage and force which slept, which in another sort of world might have asserted themselves brilliantly" (52). Myra transforms him into an old gentleman with white hair and stooped shoulders, humming to himself as he carries a tin tray or cleans his own neckties on Sunday morning (58-9). Their life, Myra realizes, has been "the ruin of us both. We've destroyed each other. . . . We've thrown our lives away" (75). Yet Nellie's impression differs at the end, where she notes in him something of the statue or sentinel: "Now I knew it meant indestructable constancy. . . almost indestructible youth" (103). It is this youth which defeats Myra ultimately and which destroys her, for she herself has aged and become ill and ugly. After her death Oswald finally goes too late to Alaska, the land of pioneers, and scatters Myra's ashes in the sea, only to die there himself.

The first part of the novel is devoted to art and culture, with Myra as its centre. Although Myra wishes for a richer life, with "a carriage--with stables and a house and servants" and says to Nellie "it's very nasty being poor!" (41), yet the life which the Henshawes live is filled with what seems luxury to Nellie: amethysts, furs, dinners out, opera and theatre. And their apartment on the second

floor of an old brownstone house on Madison Square symbolizes this life:

I loved it from the moment I entered it; such solidly built, high-ceiled rooms, with snug fire-places and wide doors and deep windows. The long, heavy velvet curtains and the velvet chairs were a wonderful plum-colour, like ripe purple fruit. The curtains were lined with that rich cream-colour that lies under the blue skin of the ripe figs. . . . Everything in their little apartment seemed to me to be absolutely individual and unique, even the dinner service; the thick grey plates and the soup tureen painted with birds and big, bright flowers--I was sure there were no others like them in the world. (26-7)

Here Myra is surrounded by a society of the cultured: "actors, musicians, literary men" (38), as well as the business men whom she secretly mocks. Esther and Ewan Grey belong to theatrical companies currently playing in New York; the singer Madame Modjeska is a close friend to whom Myra sends a holly bush and cookies at Christmas; Anne Aylward the young poet dying from tuberculosis she visits to discuss the latest talk of the art world: "Their talk quite took my breath away; they said such exciting, such fantastic things about people, books, music--anything; they seemed to speak together a highly flavoured special language" (42). And at Myra's New Year Party, these are gathered together, the actors still fresh from their evening performances with traces of make-up or wigs. Madame Modjeska sings and they discuss Sarah Bernhardt in Hamlet, Jean de Reszke's return to the Metropolitan Opera Company, and Norma in which Madame Modjeska is currently performing. Of these artists Nellie observes: "Most of them are dead now, but it was a fine group that stood about the table to drink the New Year in" (45).¹⁵

In the second section, these traces of art and culture are

gone. Madame Modjeska has died several years previously and Myra has masses said yearly for her soul. Anne Aylward has presumably died, and Myra has avoided other friends in her ill and impoverished condition. The son of an actress friend has shot himself over a love affair, suggesting the futility of art and love in the modern world. Although the librarian brings Myra books, her eyes are too tired to read and she hates the poets of the new generation who write "ugly lines about ugly people and common feelings" (80), returning to her memory for the great poetry of the past and reciting lines from Richard II or King John: "How the great poets do shine on, Nellie! Into all the dark corners of the world. They have no night" (82). And she recites long passages from her old favourites in between her codeine-induced dreams (91). While Oswald has as an admirer, the gauche young reporter whom he tells of "music, or German poetry, or about the actors and writers he had known" (78), Myra does not see this acquaintance and has only her memories of Heine and Shakespeare to console her.

Although their apartment retains some of the furniture of the salon; rugs, some old pictures, the desk and the inlaid tea-table, "the dear, plum-coloured curtains, their cream lining streaked and faded" (63), although Myra still serves tea in "her own silver tea things" and the English china cups she has always carried with her (71), the effect is countered by the slamming of the doors and running and tramping of the people upstairs, and the presence around of the sordid details of existence. For the atmosphere of the salon is a protected one:

That's the cruelty of being poor; it leaves you at the mercy of such pigs! Money is a protection, a cloak; it can buy one quiet, and some sort of dignity." (68)

and later:

I am a greedy, selfish, worldly old woman; I wanted success and a place in the world. Now I'm old and ill and a fright, but among my own kind I'd still have my circle; I'd have courtesy from people of gentle manners, and not have my brains beaten out by hoodlums. Go away, please, both of you. (75)

As age and illness come to dominate her life, religion replaces art in her devotions. Yet the religious associations of the novel are not theological but, in the manner of Death Comes for the Archbishop, primarily aesthetic. Religion appears in the first section only in connection with Myra's rich uncle, John Driscoll who, in accord with his warnings concerning Myra's marriage to Oswald Henshawe, has left all his money to the Catholic Church and his property to the Sisters of the Church. Religion has replaced the life of the salon; the Sisters pace under the apple-trees, behind the iron fence where Myra walked for the last time out of the iron gates; and dedication and discipline have replaced love and romance:

I used to walk there . . . on spring days, after school, and watch the nuns pacing so mildly and measuredly among the blossoming trees where Myra used to give garden-parties and have the band to play for her. I thought of the place as being under a spell, like the Sleeping Beauty's palace; it had been in a trance, or lain in its flowers like a beautiful corpse, ever since that winter night when Love went out of the gates and gave the dare to Fate. Since then, chanting and devotions and discipline, and the tinkle of little bells that seemed forever calling the Sisters in to prayers. (17)

Yet although the associations of religion itself are with Death rather than with life, in Part I, it is also intimately connected with the life of culture and money. Death in the grand style is preferable to a life of pettiness and routine. Even before Myra's decline, Nellie believes that John Driscoll has "the more romantic part": "Was it

not better to get out of the world with such pomp and dramatic splendour than to linger on in it, having to take account of shirts and railway trains?" (19) And the funeral of John Driscoll represent the aesthetic possibilities of a church which dedicates itself to the service of the rich:

The high altar blazed with hundreds of candles, the choir was entirely filled by the masses of flowers. The bishop was there, and a flock of priests in gorgeous vestments. When the pallbearers arrived, Driscoll did not come to the church; the church went to him. The bishop and clergy went down the nave and met that great black coffin at the door, preceded by the cross and boys swinging cloudy censurs, followed by the choir chanting to the organ. They surrounded, they received, they seemed to assimilate into the body of the church, the body of old John Driscoll. They bore it up to the high altar on a river of colour and incense and organ-tone; they claimed it and enclosed it. . . . I thought of John Driscoll as having escaped the end of all flesh. . . . From the freshness of roses and lilies, from the glory of the high altar, he had gone straight to the greater glory, through smoking censurs and candles and stars. (18-19)

It is not until the second section of the novelette that Myra turns to religion as a centre of order and stability, quiet and peace, something permanent in place of art which is temporary and passing:

Religion is different from anything else; because in religion seeking is finding. . . . She seemed to say that in other searchings it might be the object of the quest that brought satisfaction, or it might be something incidental that one got on the way; but in religion, desire was fulfillment, it was the seeking itself that rewarded. (94)¹⁷

But it is the symbols of Catholicism, not the doctrine, which Myra grasps: the ebony crucifix with the ivory Christ which she keeps beside her bed (92), dying with it in her hand; the candles which she has burning by her bedside in place of electric lights, because their very flames seem to be religious, in association with the beginnings of the church in the catacombs (94); her desire for "holy words and holy rites" in the midst of the "heathendom" of this modern world (85-6). She

prefers a convent sister by her bed to a nurse, and secretes money for "unearthly purposes" in an old glove, for masses for Madame Modjeska's soul and later for her own.

This dedication to religion leads directly to her rejection of Oswald as "her mortal enemy", her "idolatry" (96). As he says to Father Faye, "it is one of her delusions that I separated her from the Church" (99). John Driscoll, in warning Myra against marrying Oswald, has said: "A poor man stinks, and God hates him" (15), an expression of the old Puritan doctrine that God rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked financially. At first Myra blames God for her fate, which she believes to be "one more piece of evidence, one more, against the hideous injustice God permits in this world!" (65); but later she finds in Oswald the cause of her suffering, her idolatry (96), and the crucifix brings her comfort for: "It means nothing to people who haven't suffered" (92). Gradually Oswald takes on the associations of the people upstairs, the woman who has "the wrinkled white throat of an adder. . . and the hard eyes of one" (74). These people are the "coarse creatures", "pigs" (68), "cattle" (67), those "animals"-- "Why should I have the details of their stupid, messy existence thrust upon me all day long, and half the night?" (66)--and she blames Oswald who cannot protect her, take her away because of his poverty. In the end, he becomes identified with them: "the noise overhead she now attributed to her husband. 'Ah, there, he's beginning it again,' she would say, 'He'll wear me down in the end'" (92). Ultimately Oswald becomes responsible for the sins of this world which have separated Myra from art, culture and religion, from the world where she rightfully

belongs.

Yet in the end, Myra turns in death not to the Church but to Nature. She insists on the last rites, yet she chooses to die, not attended by the sister and the priest, but at dawn on a bare headland which reaches out to sea. The place of Nature in the novel is thus ultimately associated with the absolution of religion. In the first section of the novel, nature is secondary, merely a small part of the vibrant life of the city as in the London scenes of Alexander's Bridge. The shubbery and trees in the parks are flourishing in the midst of city streets, seeming "well-groomed and sociable, like pleasant people" (25). Although it is Christmas and the snow is falling, the fountain still laughs, and man dominates the seasons:

[The fountain's] rhythmical splash was like the voice of the place. It rose and fell like something taking deep, happy breaths; and the sound was musical, seemed to come from the throat of spring. Not far away, on the corner, was an old man selling English violets. Here, I felt, winter brought no desolation; it was tamed, like a polar bear led on a leash by a beautiful lady. (25)

Setting is important here only in its contribution to the atmosphere of excitement and cultural vitality, and as a contrast to the later sordidness of the small city where Nellie rediscovers Myra and Oswald:

[It was] a sprawling West-coast city which was in the throes of rapid development--it ran about the shore, stumbling all over itself and finally tumbled into the sea. Every hotel and boarding house was overcrowded and I was very poor. (57)

Yet near here Myra discovers a bare headland above the sea which reminds her of Gloucester's cliff, where he sought death after betrayal by his "mortal enemy". Here "a few steamers" passed below her, and the gulls dipped and darted about the headland, the soft shine of the sun on their wings", under the watery yellow light of the late afternoon (73).

Here Myra chooses to die, leaning against the cedar tree and facing the ocean, her crucifix in her hand.¹⁸ As Nellie tells Oswald, "She must have died peacefully and painlessly. There was every reason to believe she had lived to see the dawn" (101). Here she has found absolution; as she has said to Nellie:

Light and silence: they heal all one's wounds--all but one, and that is healed by death and silence. . . . [Dawn] is always such a forgiving time. When that first cold, bright streak comes over the water, it's as if all our sins were pardoned; as if the sky leaned over the earth and kissed it and gave it absolution. You know how the great sinners always came home to die in some religious house, and the abbot or abbess went out and received them with a kiss? (73)

And while she leaves money for masses, her last request is that her body be cremated and the ashes spread "in some lonely and unfrequented place in the mountains, or in the sea" (102).

Thus My Mortal Enemy resolves not in the order of religion but in a return to nature. Despite her crucifix and her avowed faith, Myra finds redemption for her sins, ultimately the peace and end of seeking in Nature, not in art or in the Church. Here with Jim Burden she finds complete fulfilment:

Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.¹⁹

Myra's quest for peace has led her away from art, ultimately away from religion, and back to nature. That this is so indicates Cather's doubts concerning Catholicism as the true answer to life's problems. Her next two novels will affirm the power of religion and the Catholic Church to bring peace and joy. But in the end, Cather comes back

ultimately, with "Neighbour Rosicky", to the affirmation of nature as meaning in the face of death.

13. DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP:

In religion, desire was fulfilment, it was the seeking itself that rewarded.¹

In My Mortal Enemy, Cather turns away from the life of fulfilment in art and nature to the Catholic church and to the order of religion as a centre of stability in life, to counteract the change and mutability in human life, the unfulfilled desire. Her attraction for Catholicism is seen here to be primarily aesthetic and non-doctrinal. In Death Comes for the Archbishop, she turns again to the Church, here Catholicism as it existed in the past on the frontiers of America, and she considers the life of two Catholic priests who bring Christianity to the wilderness. Yet her attraction is again aesthetic. She admits in her essay "On Death Comes for the Archbishop" that she had two primary interests which gave impetus to the writing of the novel: her interest in the figure of Archbishop Lamy, the distinguished and well-bred original of Jean Marie Latour, her curiosity as to "the daily life of such a man in a crude frontier society";² and her fascination with the old ruined mission churches, their frescoes and decorations: "The longer I stayed in the Southwest, the more I felt that the story of the Catholic Church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories".³ Death Comes for the Archbishop differs from its predecessors then, not in dealing with religion rather than art, but in dealing with art in the service of religion. The central figure now is not an artist alone but also a priest, and the objets d'art which add

beauty and value to life are largely religious. Even culture becomes religious; the Mexican women employ their skill in handicraft to decorate the altars of the church, the figures of the saints, and the persons of their priests. And domestic art is associated with religion through its connection to the lives of the priests and to the ritual of the church. The novel also conveys a breadth of religious experience which is unparalleled in any other of Cather's works. Through the lives and missions of Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant, we are brought into contact with the rituals of the Indians and their age-old traditions, with the acclimatized Catholicism of the Mexicans and the descendants of Spain, with the profligacy and open sin of many local priests as well as the simplicity and dedication of others, with the legendary figures of the New World saints, and with the intellectualized faith of European Catholicism. Thus the central structure of the novel is religious, and all the characters, European, Mexican and Indian, look to religion for fulfilment and security.⁴

But it is the role of the Church as preserver of tradition and culture, of stability and faith, with which Cather is concerned in Death Comes for the Archbishop, not with the Church as human revelation of the primacy of God in human experience. Thus Cather's avoidance of conflict is not incidental but part of the original conception of the novel. In her essay "On Shadows on the Rock", Cather explains "And really, a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages".⁵ This view is possible only in retrospect, for the new society will not begin at all unless these conflicts be controlled. But Cather chooses to evade the problems of

conflict which the Catholic Church must face in its new diocese, not only problems with the alien traditions of the Indians but schism and anarchy within its own ranks. The conflict is easily evaded. Although there are both good and evil characters, they divide too easily into categories. There is no evil in the priests, Latour, Vaillant, Father Jesus, the Mexicans, Jacinto, Magdalena, Dona Isabella, as there is no real good in Father Martínez, Father Gallegos, Lucero, Trinidad, Buck Scales, the Smiths, and the Olivares relatives. The eventual triumph of good over evil is predetermined and facile. In one chapter Padre Martínez is in full control of the Church at Taos; in the next "At the Bishop's suggestion, Padre Martínez formally resigned his parish, with the understanding that he was still to celebrate Mass upon solemn occasions" (159).⁶ Although he formed a schismatic church, he conveniently dies shortly after and is "buried in schism" (162).⁷

This evasion of conflict is deliberate and chosen. In her open letter to the editor of the Commonweal, Cather explains a third inspiration for the style of the novel:

I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment. Since I first saw the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes of the life of Saint Geneviève in my student days, I have wished that I could try something a little like that in prose; something without accent, with none of the artificial elements of composition. In the Golden Legend, the martyrdoms of the saints are no more dwelt upon than are the trivial incidents of their lives; it is as if though all human experiences, measured against one supreme spiritual experience, were of about the same importance. . . . The essence of such writing is. . . to touch and pass on. . . . The mood is the thing--all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it.⁸

The comparison of Puvis de Chavannes is significant for he was the successor to the great fresco painters of the Italian Renaissance who

moved towards an abstract theme and a stylized technique. Certain characteristics of this style attracted Cather and suggested a means to accomplish her own movement towards abstraction. The landscape, in particular, is dominant and indispensable, so that the figures exist only in ^{the} context of this background. The settings and characters are universalized and without individual detail; they convey not a realistic recreation of life but a representation of the human soul.⁹ McColl's description of de Chavannes' technique in "The Winter of the Hotel de Ville" suggests also the technique which Cather adapted to her novel. The tones are pale, and the masses broad and flat. The artist would set a key for his composition in one tone, and build around a few important values, painting without heavy shadows and simplifying his design to that of a cartoon or a child's drawing.¹⁰ Here Cather has found her equivalent mood in painting. The extreme simplicity which is the result of concealed art, the predominance of certain moods or tones which provide a key for the whole, the dominance of the landscape which is stronger than the human figures in it, the deliberate avoidance of drama and conflict even where these are almost an inherent part of the narrative: all these are characteristic of Death Comes for the Archbishop. Furthermore, the classical touch and the deliberate choice of old themes and past situations are typical of Cather's later works, together with the mood of nostalgia which is evident in My Ántonia and which dominates Shadows on the Rock altogether.¹¹

The structure of the novel too suggests de Chavannes' technique. To Mary Chase, Cather had observed: "I can't write plots--I don't see life in terms of action. Persons like me who see it in terms of thought

and imagery would best keep away from suspense. It's design they want, not conflict".¹² Here she achieves her ideal: pure design. As Keeler observes, the effect of her organization is flat; like the frescoes, the pictures are static and there is no movement except that of the viewer.¹³ Lambert describes this technique as similar to beads on a string with no tension or apparent cohesion¹⁴, while Curtin notes that the structure is anecdotal and that since there is no real plot or even chronology, most of the events are interchangeable.¹⁵ Yet the whole is unified by the mood or tone and by the relation of each of the descriptions, inset narratives, portraits, legends to the Catholic mission in New Mexico and the lives of the two priests, who form the connective for the individual episodes or tales.¹⁶ The mood is supreme; as Cather has stated concerning her method of writing:

Always the end was seen from the beginning, and in each case it was the end I set out to reach. . . the feeling of the end, the mood. . . . Practically everything beside the central purpose or the central feeling comes spontaneously and unexpectedly, though they all grow out of the main theme and out of the feeling and experience that made me choose that theme.¹⁷

The style is influenced too by mood; as Cather indicates in her essay on Sarah Orne Jewett, that style is successful when "the quality of feeling comes inevitably out of the theme itself; when the language, the stresses, the very structure of the sentences are imposed upon the writer by the special mood of the piece".¹⁸ In Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather achieves her supreme statement of artistic purity of style.

The predominance of nostalgia in the final chapters of Death Comes for the Archbishop suggests that the concern of the novel is

more nearly that of My Ántonia, the search of the artist for self-fulfilment, than it is religious. The end of My Ántonia is cyclical: "I had a sense of coming home to myself, of having found out what a little circle man's experience is".¹⁹ And twelve years later, Cather returns to the same theme: "To fulfil the dreams of one's youth; that is the best that can happen to a man. No worldly success can take the place of that" (161). On his death bed, Latour dreams, not of the future and of his coming union with God, but of the past, of his own and Vaillant's youth, their hopes and dreams and dreams:

During these last weeks of the Bishop's life he thought very little about death; it was the Past he was leaving. The future would take care of itself. But he had an intellectual curiosity about dying; about the changes that took place in a man's beliefs and scale of values. More and more life seemed to him an experience of the Ego, in no sense the Ego itself. This conviction he believed, was something apart from his religious life; it was an enlightenment that came to him as a man, a human creature. And he noticed that he judged conduct differently now; his own and that of others. The mistakes of his life seemed unimportant, accidents that occurred en route. . . . He sat in the middle of his own consciousness; none of his former states of mind were lost or outgrown. They were all within reach of his hand, and all comprehensible. (289-90)

The Bishop's quest, like Jim's, has been to find the meaning of the self and of life; it is primarily humanistic and oriented to the past, rather than concerned with theological issues. God plays no real part in this drama of death, nor in the final memory of Nature in the Old World and the point of determination which has brought him and Vaillant to the New World:

In reality the Bishop was not there at all; he was standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains, and he was trying to give consolation to a young man who was being torn in two before his own eyes by the desire to go and the necessity to stay. (299)²⁰

While this conclusion is technically satisfying in its return

to its beginnings, it indicates one of Cather's real weaknesses, her stress on adolescent vision and intuition over adult experience and true compassion. And its hazy sentimentality in a work dealing ostensibly with the life and mission of two Catholic priests, its recognition of human achievement without God as a central force in life, indicates that Cather in her search for a meaning in life, has turned to Catholicism for its emphasis on the past and on fulfilment through aesthetic experience rather than for its confrontation of the conflicts and choices of the modern adult world.²¹ In Death Comes for the Archbishop then, religion becomes a refuge from the dilemmas of life, the moral, political, religious and even human conflicts which exist outside the faith. When it is suggested that Magdalena, wife of the murderer Buck Scales, should marry again and build a life apart from the Church, Father Vaillant replies, "No, no! She has had enough of the storms of this world. Here she is safe and happy" (210). For Cather Catholicism becomes the final escape from life. This escape is illusory and exists only in the context of the past. It is not possible for the Professor in the modern world, and even Myra Henshawe turns to the Church, not in real faith but as a form of revenge upon "her mortal enemy". For in the real world, religion cannot solve the dilemmas of life: "No faith. . . could save one".²²

Nature: The First Creation Morning

The landscape in Death Comes for the Archbishop plays an important role similar to that of the background in the frescoes of Puvis de Chavannes; it is similarly indispensable: "without the land-

scape the picture would not exist",²³ and the relationships between figures and landscape define the characters and inter-relate the disparate elements of the narrative. The landscape then becomes the structural centre of the novel, the chain on which the separate beads of incident are strung.²⁴

The use of landscape, however, differs greatly from that in the novels of the land, My Antonia and O Pioneers!. Although in these novels, the time span covers a number of years, and although the land does change in some particulars, it is essentially the same, and the nostalgic evocation at the end of the novel coincides with the descriptions at the beginning. In "Neighbour Rosicky" the unity of time and place confines the landscape to one area which changes only from season to season, not from generation to generation. In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the land is active, almost a character in its own right.²⁵ The panoramic presentation of its vast expanse and its varied scenes stresses the grandeur of nature in the Southwest, its masculine force and endurance which challenge the efforts of man to spread an alien religion and culture to its peoples. And here Cather has achieved her ideal, for the land remains unconquered. It may be challenged and endured, but it cannot essentially be changed by European order. It counters the passivity of the characters, giving the novel vitality and colour. Thus it becomes a unifying force in the novel, giving meaning to the lives of the priests, the Indians, the Mexicans, setting the tone for the novel and establishing the dominant mood of order and beauty.²⁶

Basic to the presentation of the Southwest is the contrast

between the Old World and the New, The Prologue recreates the mood of Europe in the description of the Bishop's garden in the Sabine Hills, looking out across the undulating landscape towards Rome, indistinct in the distance. The scene is dominated by the warm tones of green, orange and the gold of the sunset, and the contrast of this domesticated beauty with the masculinity of the New World landscape is achieved in the juxtaposition of this setting with the account of the new missions:

From his [the new priest's] seat to Santa Fé is a distance of fifteen hundred English miles. There are no wagon roads, no canals, no navigable rivers. Trade is carried on by means of pack-mules, over treacherous trails. The desert down there has a peculiar horror; I do not mean thirst, nor Indian massacres, which are frequent. The very floor of the world is cracked open into countless canyons and arroyos, fissures in the earth which are sometimes ten feet deep, sometimes a thousand.²⁷

The new Bishop must be prepared to face the challenges of nature, to sacrifice the world of harmony in a submissive landscape, of order and culture, for the challenge of a new and crude frontier: "He will have no easy life, your Eminence. The country will drink up his youth and strength as it does the rain. He will be called upon for every sacrifice, quite possibly for martyrdom" (10). Yet in the end, Latour chooses this frontier with its grandeur and strength, its wildness and freedom, over the humanized beauty of the Old World:

He loved the towering peaks of his native mountains, the comeliness of its villages, the cleanness of the country-side, the beautiful lines and cloisters of his own college. Clermont was beautiful,--but he found himself sad there; his heart lay like a stone in his breast. There was too much past, perhaps. . . . When the summer wind stirred the lilacs in the old gardens and shook down the blooms of the horse-chestnuts, he sometimes closed his eyes and thought of the high song the wind was singing in the straight, striped pine trees in the Navajo forests. (274)

When retiring, he has the choice of France or New Mexico , and he

chooses the New World predominantly for its nature:

In New Mexico he always awoke a young man. . . . His first consciousness was a sense of the light dry wind blowing in through the windows, with the fragrance of hot sun and sage-brush and sweet clover, a wind that made one's body feel light and one's heart cry "today, today", like a child's. Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert, for the wind that made one a boy again. . . . One could breathe that only on the bright edges of the world, on the great grass plains or the sage-brush desert. (274-5)

The equation of the desert, uncontrolled by man and unordered even by Nature itself, with the New World of Creation and the morning of human existence, is made explicit in a passage describing the desert near Ácoma, at once new and ancient, negating time, human existence and culture in its preservation of the original chaos before the world was made:

From the flat red sea of sand rose great rock mesas, generally Gothic in outline, resembling vast cathedrals. They were not crowded together in disorder, but placed in wide spaces, long vistas between. This plain might once have been an enormous city, all the smaller quarters destroyed by time, only the public buildings left,--piles of architecture that were like mountains. The sandy soil of the plain had a light sprinkling of junipers, and was splotched with masses of blooming rabbit brush,--that olive-coloured plant that grows in high waves like a tossing sea. . . . This mesa plain had an appearance of great antiquity and of incompleteness; as if, with all the materials for world-making assembled, the Creator had desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau. The Country was still waiting to be made into a landscape. (94-5)

Looking out over the scene after a sudden storm, the Bishop sees the mesa and the mountains brilliant in the sunlight and thinks: "the first Creation morning might have looked like this, when the dry land was first drawn up out of the deep, and all was unorganized confusion" (99). The country west of Albuquerque is described not in terms of Creation

and divine activity but of the wasteland, "a country of dry ashes; no juniper, no rabbit brush, nothing but thickets of withered dead-looking cactus, and patches of wild pumpkin--the only vegetable that had any vitality" (88). Even this primitive form of vegetation suggests a more primitive form of life, a colony of lizards, matted and clumped together, its prickly silver leaves shaped like arrows to emphasize the tenacity and malevolence of any form of life which succeeds in challenging the forces of elemental nature.

Yet the vitality of Cather's presentation of landscape in Death Comes for the Archbishop lies not in the change of individual settings, but in the technique of contrast which brings together all the varied and conflicting appearances of nature in New Mexico. In the midst of the desert, we find oases such as Santa Fé, where the town flows from the little main street "like a stream from a spring" (22), and Agua Secreta where, among the arid wastelands of the haycocks as "red as brick-dust and naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees" (18), Latour finds the town of Hidden Water, "greener than anything Latour had ever seen, even in his own greenest corner of the Old World" (24). The village suggests the idyllic rural scenes of Wordsworth with its simple and idealized natural life: "running water, clover fields, cottonwoods, acacias, little adobe houses with brilliant gardens, a boy driving a flock of white goats" (24). Here the people have "all they needed to make them happy"; like *Ántonia* they are completely fulfilled through their contact with nature: "They spun and wove from the fleece of their flocks, raised their own corn and wheat and tobacco, dried their plums and apricots for winter" (26). And the

little town becomes for Cather a symbol of man's attempt to impose order on nature, even in the midst of a new and alien world. Where a little subterranean spring rises to the surface among the over-shaped brick-red hills, man has created "grass and trees and flowers and human life; household order and hearths from which the smoke of burning piñon logs rose like incense to heaven" (31).

Yet the effect of the desert setting with its masculine aspects of sky and desert, sagebrush and juniper, is countered by the predominance of sunset in the descriptions of the novel. This emphasis upon sunset gives Death Comes for the Archbishop the golden tone of peace and reminiscence which so many critics have noted. It transfers to the New World the harmony of man with Nature in the Sabine Gardens above Rome, where the setting sun turns the dome of St. Peter's to copper, the ilex trunks to red and the oleander blooms to gold. Although Part One opens with the aridity of the desert, and the brilliant colours of red sand, green juniper and blue sky, our first view of Santa Fé is in the evening, the reds of the hills subdued to carnelian and rose, curving like two arms about the little town: "A thin, wavering adobe town. . . . The church towers, and all the low adobe houses, were rose colour in that light,--a little darker in tone than the amphitheatre of red hills behind" (22). And the novel closes as it opens, with the Archbishop returning to die at Santa Fé "late in the evening towards sunset", in order to gaze from above on the "open golden face of his Cathedral" (170-1). As he gazes, the deepening shadows intensify the reds and golds, and the hills again become carnelian, the rich colour of the dried blood of the martyrs (273). As well, there are two

sunsets between Isleta and Laguna (89,90), a sunset at the Pecos pueblo (119), a sunset at Taos (150), and the two sunsets on the Rio Grande Valley where La Tour has discovered the rock for his cathedral and shows it to Vaillant. Finally the Archbishop dies quietly at sunset, the Cathedral bell tolling to announce his passing just after dark (299). Thus the tones of red and gold in the landscape echo through the novel and are reinforced by the choice of stone for the Cathedral, "yellow, a strong golden ochre, very much like the gold of the sunset that was now beating upon it" (241). The base of the hill is subdued by the shadows to rich yellow, but the top was "melted gold--a colour that throbbed in the last rays of the sun" (244).

In contrast to this emphasis, there are only five references to sunrise, and three of these are connected predominantly with Vaillant: his departure from Santa Fé for Pike's peak (255), his return to Colorado (261), and the original departure of Vaillant and La Tour for the New World which is recounted to us only through the memory of the aged Latour (284-5). Latour is connected only with the morning through reminiscence; his memories are largely nostalgic and do not tally with the impressions of the country which we have experienced directly. Indeed they seem almost to be transposed from O Pioneers! or My Ántonia, and they indicate the merging in the last section of Cather's own memories with the real account of Howlett. Here Latour rejects the culture and art of the Old World for the nature of the New, for the freedom of the air which he finds only "on the bright edges of the world" (275) and which releases the spirit of man from the physical body, from age and bondage in human flesh, into the newness of the

world: it "released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!" (276).

Basically, then, Latour is associated with evening and sunset, with nature controlled and domesticated, while it is Vaillant who is associated with the real challenge of the desert. Latour's garden is his only real connection with nature. Although we are told through retrospective narrative that he has lived a life of deprivation and discomfort in travel: "abroad for weeks together on short rations, sleeping in the open, unable to keep his body clean" (277), we see only his absorption with the softer aspects of Nature except for the opening passage in the desert near Agua Secreta. His first spring in the wilderness is marked by his planting of his orchards for apple and cherry trees, and his garden of salad greens. He prunes and tends his garden as a form of recreation, and he even retains Joseph from his new parish, long after he is well, on the excuse that Joseph has not seen the lotus blossoms from the five bulbs he brought originally from Rome. Here in this garden, nature is domesticated and controlled, and it becomes a refuge from life for Magdalena who feeds the doves and gathers flowers for the altar, apple blossoms or daffodils or flowers of the season. Here "she is safe and happy" (210). When he later moves to his new home near the Tusuque pueblo, Latour establishes another garden in the red sandhills, and retires here among his fruit-tree, acacias and the native wild flowers which he cultivates in the shelter of the garden. This preoccupation with nature domesticated Cather connects rather incongruously to Latour's religious beliefs:

Father Latour's recreation was his garden. He grew such fruit as

was hardly to be found even in the old orchards of California; cherries and apricots, apples and quinces, and the peerless pears of France. . . . Wherever there was a French priest, there should be a garden of fruit trees and vegetables and flowers. He often quoted to his students that passage from their fellow Auvergnat, Pascal: that "Man was lost and saved in a garden", (267)

Latour's relationship to the more dominant masculine aspects of nature in the New World is achieved vicariously through Joseph Vaillant, the real natural hero of the novel who, like *Ántonia*, represents the opposite pole of experience for the central character.²⁸ Through the account of his experience, narrated retrospectively and at a distance, Cather is able to expand the very limited experiences of the Bishop and to associate him by implication with the variety and range of experience in reality participated in by others. Thus there is no obvious discrepancy when, on his deathbed, Latour says, "I shall not die of a cold, my son. I shall die of having lived" (269). In reality, however it is someone like Vaillant whom the missionary priest describes in Rome as the proper hero to challenge the wilderness and to extend over it the control and order of the Church:

He will have to deal with savagery and ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigue. . . . He will eat dried buffalo meat and frijoles with chili, and he will be glad to drink water when he can get it. He will have no easy life, your Eminence. (8-10)

The figure of Vaillant is taken almost directly from Cather's source, Father Howlett, whom she acknowledges belatedly after the publication of the novel in her essay "On Death Comes for the Archbishop": "In the main, I followed the life story of the two Bishops very much as it was, though I used many of my own experiences, and some of my father's".²⁹ In actuality, Cather uses her own experience for Latour, focussing the narrative on him, and selects from the records those experiences which

convey Vaillant as the heroic man of nature in the novel. In fact, Father Machéboeuf is really of equal importance to Father Lamy as Vicar Apostolic of Colorado and Utah and first Bishop of Denver; he too has been an important element in the establishment of culture on the frontier, building one hundred and four churches, and bringing sixty-four priests and three thousand children to the Catholic school system of the region.³⁰

Vaillant is the perfect foil for Latour, physically and emotionally. Short, skinny, bow-legged, with a scrawny neck and watery near-sighted eyes, he is also given his due as "homely, real, persistent, with the driving power of a dozen men" (37-8). It is he and not Latour who faces and conquers nature. Cather describes him as:

The wiry little priest whose life was to be a succession of mountain ranges, pathless deserts, yawning canyons and swollen rivers, who was to carry the Cross into territories yet unknown and unnamed, who would wear down mules and horses and scouts and stage-drivers. (41)

He is called "Trompe-La Mort" for he has challenged even death. In Ohio, he was so ill with cholera his name was printed in the death columns of the newspaper. He is brought back from a village in the Pecos mountains where he has caught the black measles giving the sacrament to the sick and dying (120), and again from Arizona where he has fallen ill with malarial fever from "exposure and bad water" (200). He finds his real destiny in Pike's Peak, a country crowded with tents and shacks and thousands of miners, and in Denver City with its saloons and gambling houses, where life lacks the essentials of civilized living; linens, gardens, butter, eggs and milk or fruit (260). He travels through:

Creede, Durango, Silver City, Central City, over the Continental Divide into Utah,--his strange Episopal carriage was known throughout that rugged granite world. . . . He wore out driver after driver, and his coach was repaired so often and so extensively that long before he abandoned it there was none of the original structure left. Broken tongues and singletrees, smashed wheels and splintered axles he considered trifling matters. Twice the old carriage itself slipped off the mountain road and rolled down the gorge, with the priest inside. . . . The second time. . . he was lamed for life, and could never ride horseback again. (257-8)

Yet on he travels, through the mountain towns of Boulder, Gold Hills, Caribou, Cache-à-la-Poudre, Spanish Bar, South Park, Cache Creek, California Gulch.

And he wins the hearts of the people. The poor Mexicans of Santa Fé give him the precious dollars concealed in their shirts and boots for his mission churches. His sister and her convent find their joy and reward in making for him richly embroidered vestments, and the women of Santa Fé send him linen sheets, embroidered pillow-cases, napkins, table-cloths and boxes of fruit and beans to indicate their love and support (260). He has tact with the natives, sympathy for their frailties (223), and understanding for the rough miners so in need of his mission church. And the attendance at his funeral is so large that no one building can hold all the people who are camping nearby in wagons and tents and barns; his associate, a French priest, even leaves the hospital in Chicago where he is dying to sink down by the coffin in farewell.

The heroism of Vaillant in challenging nature is supplemented by the description of the missionary priest who appears in Rome to propose the new diocese of New Mexico: "His diocese lay within the icy arms of the Great Lakes, and on his long, lonely horseback rides among

his missions the sharp winds had bitten him well" (6). And Latour's description of the heroism of the New World priests in general is contrasted to the easier life of the martyrs in a land where Nature and man are softened and humanized:

A European could scarcely imagine such hardships. The old countries were worn to the shape of human life, made into an investiture, a sort of second body, for man. There the wild herbs and the wild fruits and the forest fungi were edible. The streams were sweet water, the trees afforded shade and shelter. But in the alkali deserts the water holes were poisonous, and the vegetation offered nothing to a starving man. Everything was dry, prickly, sharp: Spanish bayonet, juniper, greasewood, cactus; the lizard, the rattlesnake,--and man made cruel by a cruel life. Those early missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants. They thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks, climbed up and down its terrible canyons on stone-bruised feet, broke long feasts by unclean and repugnant food. . . . Whatever the early Christians suffered, it all happened in that safe little Mediterranean world, amid the old manners, the old landmarks. If they endured martyrdom, they died among their brethren, their relics were piously preserved, their names lived in the mouths of holy men. (277-8)

Thus the heroism of Vaillant and the priests of the New World is starker. For they must challenge not only man but nature, not only the human spirit, but even physical existence. They sacrifice order and routine, culture and even basic physical comforts; and their reward is intangible, measured in terms of their success.

Apart from Father Vaillant, the only other central characters of the novel who belong to the order of Nature are the scout and guide Kit Carson, and the Indians themselves. Kit Carson is the guide in whose brain is the most reliable map of the desert and mountains between Santa Fé and the Pacific (76). Yet like Ray Kennedy, Tom Outland and Pierre Charron, he combines the heroism and endurance of the man of nature with the sensitivity and taste of the artist. He cannot read,

yet "one felt in him a quick and discriminating intelligence. That he was illiterate was an accident; he had got ahead of books" (76). His face is alert and thoughtful, the lips "full and delicately modulated" (75). He preserves the tradition of the stereotyped Western hero in morality, in his retention among "brutal and desperate men" of a "clean sense of honour and a compassionate heart" (77), and of "standards, loyalties, a code which is not easily put into words but which is instantly felt" (75). Yet in the end, the picture is not consistent, for he comes to represent the forces which destroy art, cultural and natural religion for petty ends when he brutally and fearlessly hunts down the Navajos and drives them to the new territory appointed for them by the government. This discrepancy is never resolved; and the portrait of Carson is thus invalid not only as historic record but as literary legend. His role in the novel is secondary, and he represents an element of the white society of the Southwest, in contrast to the Mexican and Indian societies which make up the largest part of the Bishop's territory.

The relationship of the Indians to the land, like that of the Mexicans, is passive and is presented in generalized terms. Like Crazy Ivar of O Pioneers! they are perfect children of nature in that they leave no mark on the land, passing unobtrusively through the country, as fleet as antelopes and as strong as eagles (234):

It was the Indians' way to pass through a country without disturbing anything; to pass and leave no trace, like fish through water, or birds through air. . . . They seemed to have none of the Europeans' desire to "master" nature, to arrange and re-create. . . . They ravaged neither the rivers nor the forest, and if they irrigated, they took as little water as would serve their

needs. The land and all that is bore they treated with consideration. (233-4)³¹

Yet the Indian characters remain unindividualized like the Mexicans, presented from the outside by Latour who evades the necessity of exploring Jacinto's thoughts or beliefs through his rationalization:

There was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him. (92)

Jacinto comes alive only in his remark that he likes the Bishop who does not put on a false face when he talks to Indians like most white men (94) and through his family relationships with his wife and ailing baby. Apart from this, his thoughts are mysterious, his mind impenetrable, and his religion inexplicable and almost repellant. For the vivid creation of secondary characters in the novel is not Cather's intention in Death Comes for the Archbishop. These characters are united through the landscape against which they pit themselves, and their connection to the two priests, Vaillant and Latour.

The seasonal cycle also plays little part in the novel. O Pioneers! and My Ántonia and "Neighbour Rosicky" pattern the lives of human beings on the alternating seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, fall; sterility, fertility; death, life. Even Shadows on the Rock, The Song of the Lark and The Professor's House mark the passing of the seasons as part of the total year. Death Comes for the Archbishop then is almost unique in Cather's fiction in its handling of the seasons, and the novel evokes a perpetual mood of summer, perhaps due to Cather's unfamiliarity with the Southwest in other seasons. In winter, the description is secondary. For the missionary priest in the Prologue and for Father Vaillant, winter serves as a test of ma

endurance, and the struggle against the wilderness, in the Southwest a wilderness of sand, is achieved through the discomfort of cold and hunger, biting winds and storms. In "The Bishop Chez Lui" we see Latour writing letters at his secretary on a Christmas afternoon, but the only mention of the landscape is a reference to the Old World of Auvergne (33 and 42). Even in the inset narrative "December Night", which Cather liked so well that she published it under separate cover, the description of the winter is not developed beyond the scattered references to the cold of the church, the whiteness of the snow and the brightness of the moon (212-219).³² The Bishop does not even suffer from a cold walk home, for although he offers Sada, the maid of a low-caste Protestant family, his fox-lined cloak to keep her warm, she refuses for fear of punishment by her employers.³³

The only significant departure from this is the description of May, introduced into the narrative through its connection with Latour's garden and Vaillant's worship of Mary:

The apple trees were in blossom, the cherry blooms had gone by. The air and earth interpenetrated in the warm gusts of spring; the soil was full of sunlight, and the sunlight full of red dust. The air one breathed was saturated with earthy smells, and the grass underfoot had a reflection of blue sky in it. (200-1)

In this description, Cather harmonizes the incident itself, taken almost wholly from the account of Father Howlett,³⁴ with her own peculiar genius of evoking landscape and mood; yet the passage reveals Cather's real interest, for its emphasis is primarily on the fertility associations, and the relation of fertile garden to barren desert in the contrast of feminine subservience and masculine dominance, in the mode of O Pioneers! and My Ántonia.

Thus the landscape in Death Comes for the Archbishop plays an important part in the narrative as a unifying device, like the back-grounds of Puvis de Chavannes, providing the dominant tones of golden reminiscence and warmth or of vitality and active involvement in life. As Keeler points out, the characters themselves are static against this background, and there is no movement except on the part of the viewers.³⁵ Against this background the characters are grouped: Mexicans, Indians, the Spanish priests, the Anglo-Saxons, the new French colony of the mission, divided by their different views and aims but united against the dominance of nature. The role of Nature has changed radically since My Ántonia; it is no longer a refuge, a centre of order for man. On it man must impose his own order to survive. But he will never completely succeed, and in this lies the glory of the Southwest over Nebraska. Cather has at last found a frontier which will remain essentially unchanging while the little drama of man plays out its part, a land which is a perpetuation of the Creation morning for eternity.

The Order of Art: "one worldly ambition" (175)

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, the emphasis upon the aesthetic suggests that its central concern is with art and the artist rather than with the religious life which it celebrates, in the account of two priests in a new diocese. This primacy of art, and its relation to the transfer of culture from the Old World to the New, is indicated by the central dream of the Bishop Jean Marie Latour, a dream which is not God-centered but man-centered:

Bishop Latour had one very keen worldly ambition: to build in Santa Fé a cathedral which would be worthy of a setting naturally beautiful. As he cherished this wish and meditated upon it, he came to feel that such a building might be a continuation of himself and his purpose, a physical body full of his aspirations after he had passed from the scene. (175)

This is the dream of the artist, to create something of permanence in a world of impermanence, something which will endure: "so long as men can breathe or eyes can see. So long lives this, and this gives life to thee".³⁶ The Bishop's real concern is to create something of beauty rather than a place of worship, something in the tradition of France:

I should like to complete it before I die--if God so wills. I wish to leave nothing to chance, or to the mercy of American builders. I had rather keep the old adobe church we have than help to build one of those horrible structures they are putting up in the Ohio cities. I want a plain church but I want a good one. (242-3)

For this purpose, Latour imports not only a French architect whose chief ambition is to build the "first Romanesque church in the New World," but also French stone-cutters: "They will certainly be no more expensive than workmen from St. Louis " (243). When Vaillant protests that the country is too poor to afford these luxuries, Latour replies that they are building "for the future" so that new men from the Seminary will come to something of beauty in the New World instead of "another ugly church on this continent where there are so many already" (244).

Here it becomes clear that Jean Marie Latour is primarily an artist rather than a priest and in many ways, a Cather surrogate as truly as Jim Burden or Professor St. Peter. Cather's choice of Archbishop Lamy for her central figure is dictated by her interest in his

cultural rather than his religious qualities, and her central concern for his heroism in accepting the life of the wilderness away from art and culture, and in transplanting to this new frontier society the values and graces of life in old France:

[I wished] that I could learn more about a pioneer churchman who looked so well-bred and distinguished. In his pictures one felt the same thing, something fearless and fine and very, very well-bred--something that spoke of race. What I felt curious about was the daily life of such a man in a crude frontier society.³⁷

The description of Latour at the beginning of Book One implies this impression. We first see him as a solitary traveller on horseback, in the arid wastes of central Mexico:

His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man,--it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his features handsome and somewhat severe. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth--brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing. (19)

His hands too suggest the artist rather than the priest. His fingers are delicate, even nervous, Vaillant notes; and his hands had "a curious authority, but not the calmness so often seen in the hands of priests; they seemed always to be investigating and making firm decisions" (209), and later "he had a very special way of handling objects that were sacred, he extended that manner to things which he considered beautiful" (241).

Latour prizes his objects of art. His books he saved when the steamer sank in Galveston harbour with all his worldly possessions "at the risk of his life" (21). He admires the hammered silver dressing set of Senor Olivares who has it copied for him, he possesses a walnut

secretary and a pair of silver candlesticks given to him by a favourite aunt at his ordination,³⁸ and is as concerned about food and wine as Auclair who firmly believes that it is his dinner which "keeps him a civilized man and a Frenchman".³⁹ He is too an isolate, never really mingling with those around him like Vaillant, who can "not be happy for long without human intercourse" (227); and he has sacrificed his life in society and in the family for his mission, so that he is lonely and cut off from humanity: "Blanchet, you have been a great harvester of souls, without pride and without shame--and I am always a little cold--un pédant" (261-2).⁴⁰ This mission is, in reality, not the transfer of the gospel of Christ to the New World, but of the culture of Europe which he accomplishes through the Cathedral, the "keen worldly ambition" which he desires, as the artist, to create as a record of his life and desire; "a continuation of himself and his purpose" (175). He plans for the French architect, the French stone-cutters, the golden rock as material from the ochre cliffs near Santa Fé, although he does not make anything himself, and he concludes to Vaillant:

I could hardly have hoped that God would gratify my personal taste, my vanity, if you will, in this way. I tell you, Blanchet, I would rather have found that hill of rock than have come into a fortune to spend in charity. (245)

Yet despite the success of Latour in accomplishing his purpose, in fulfilling the dreams of his youth (261), Cather questions through Vaillant the value of such artistic and cultural qualities in a new country, as she does in the inset tales of Father Herbert and Noel Chabanel in Shadows on the Rock and A. Wunsch in The Song of the Lark:

To man's wisdom it would have seemed that a priest with Father Latour's exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome person, and delicate perceptions all have their effect; and that a man of much rougher type would have served God well enough as the first Bishop of New Mexico. Doubtless Bishop Latour's successors would be men of a different fibre. But God had his reasons, Father Joseph devoutly believed. Perhaps it pleased Him to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality. And perhaps, after all, something would remain through the years to come, some ideal, or memory, or legend. (254)

In actuality, Latour, although he is the central figure of the novel, or narrative, as Cather preferred to call it,⁴¹ is less realized as a character than Vaillant. We are told of his graces, his intellect, his culture, his delicate perceptions, but again as in the case of Thea's voice, these are simply stated, not recreated for us. As Schmittlein points out, we do not see his daily life⁴² but rather his gardening, his dinners, and occasional contact with Indians and Mexicans and dissenting priests. Sergeant suggests that Cather has deliberately played down the account of Vaillant's achievements for:

To overemphasize this tempestuous, extravert life, would have been to weaken the spell of Archbishop Latour, to lose the sense of good manners and consideration the author showed in relation to this pious, withdrawn prelate, whose nature refused too much exposure.⁴³

Sergeant is correct in her interpretation, yet she clarifies the case; it is the good manners and the grace and consideration with which Cather is concerned rather than with priestly activities in creating a new mission. Moreover, even as an artist Latour has deteriorated from Cather's standard. As Randall points out, he no longer makes anything himself, but simply chooses the stone and the stone-cutters. He is essentially passive, a connoisseur like the

priest who collects El Grecos and Fray Baltazar who enjoys the best foods and wines.⁴⁴ His central role is not as creator of the beautiful but as preserver, and as an agent of transfer of European culture to the raw crude frontiers of America. In this sense, for Cather, he becomes heroic.

The central image of Death Comes for the Archbishop, Latour's Cathedral transfers to the New World of the Southwest the art of France. It becomes, ^{as} Latour dreams, an important part of its setting: "only in Italy, or in the opera, did churches leap out of mountains and black pines like that" (272). At the centre of the novel's structure, the Cathedral unifies the other images of the novel, reflecting the tones of the landscape around, the gold of the sunset on the hills, the art of French design and French craftsmanship, of Indian and Mexican handicraft, of Catholic ritual and worship. Thus it unites the various strands of culture in the novel; European, Indian, Mexican, American, Catholic, and indicates also the intermingling of aestheticism with religion which gives the novel the effect of a religious work.

Historically, however, the Cathedral was not a unifying image. While Cather sees it as a successful transfer of culture, and a solvent to unite the disparate cultures of the New World, Mary Austin comments that the imposition of French culture upon Santa Fé actually destroyed its own native traditions:

A French Cathedral in a Spanish town [,] it was a calamity to the local culture. We have never got over it. It dropped the local mystery plays almost out of use, and many other far derived Spanish customs.⁴⁵

Thus Cather's sensitivity to cultural unity is dulled by her equation

of all culture, European and even native, for all bring culture to the crude raw frontier. Nevertheless, the novel reflects not the historical fact, but Cather's reflection of the area as she saw it.

A secondary image of this union of culture is the mission bell which weighs eight hundred pounds and has been brought from Mexico by ox-cart, "a heroic undertaking" (44). The bell is an example of native art; it was made in 1356 as a pledge to Saint Joseph and the local people of the little besieged town threw in all their gold and silver plate which gives it the tone of silver. But its tradition is Old World, for "the Spaniards handed on their skill to the Mexicans, and the Mexicans have taught the Navajos to work silver; but it all came from the Moors" (45). Again, while the bell is a religious object, its real value lies in its aesthetic inheritance from the East; Vaillant has taught a young native to ring the Ave Maria correctly, but when he first hears it, Latour is preoccupied not with its religious associations, but with its silver tone and with the picture of Jerusalem and palm trees which it evokes (43). The "heroism" of its transference to Santa Fé is related to the overcoming of the challenge of nature, and to the triumph of art and culture over the immense spaces of the New World.⁴⁶

The original impetus of the novel too is primarily aesthetic, and is related to the union of Catholic culture and native traditions in the New World, as Cather explains in her letter to the Commonweal:

The longer I stayed in the Southwest, the more I felt that the story of the Catholic church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories. The old mission churches, even those which were abandoned and in ruins, had a moving reality about them; the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes,

the countless fanciful figures of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling. They were all fresh, individual, first-hand. Almost every one of those many remote little adobe churches in the mountains or in the desert had something lovely that was its own. In lonely, sombre villages in the mountains the church decorations were sombre, the martyrdoms bloodier, the grief of the Virgin more agonized, the figure of Death more terrifying. In warm, gentle valleys everything about the churches was milder. . . . No record of them could be as real as they are themselves. . . . The people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way [of telling what they felt] and left their message.⁴⁷

In her bitter comments on the replacement of these old images and decorations, "which have a definite artistic and historic value," by factory-made items from Ohio,⁴⁸ Cather indicates that her concern is primarily aesthetic. For the intention of religious art is to create a religious experience, to lead beyond the material to the divine, whereas Cather sees it as a record of the experience of the artist, his joys and sorrows, and of the race.⁴⁹ Through their handicraft, the Mexicans are thus related to the great European tradition of Catholic art. The little nursery Virgin in Santa Fé, over two hundred years old, they decorate and dress in rich robes and laces, with gold and silver diadems, chains and brooches: "She was their doll and their queen, something to fondle and something to adore, as Mary's Son must have been to Her" (257):⁵⁰

These poor Mexicans, he [the Archbishop] reflected, were not the first to pour out their love in this simple fashion. Raphael and Titian had made costumes for Her in their time, and the great masters had made music for Her, and the great architects had built cathedrals for Her. Long before Her years on earth, in the long twilight between the Fall and the redemption, the pagan sculptors were always trying to achieve the image of a goddess who should yet be a woman. (257)

This last sentence indicates Cather's concern here is humanistic

rather than Christian; through art the Pagans sought to perfect the human being rather than to emphasize the Incarnation of God in human flesh, and the emphasis on Mary rather than on Christ suggests Cather's real pre-occupation with humanity rather than God. The ritual and images of the Church are likewise primarily aesthetic and link religious worship with handicraft and human creation. The Mass at Taos is described with a detail given to no other Church service, and despite the scandalous behavior of Padre Martínez, we are told "The Bishop was well pleased":

The building was clean and in good repair, the congregation large and devout. The delicate lace, snowy linen, and burnished brass on the altar told of a devoted Altar Guild. The boys who served at the altar wore rich smocks of hand-made lace over their scarlet cassocks. The Bishop had never heard the Mass more impressively sung than by Father Martínez. The man had a beautiful baritone voice, and he drew from some deep well of emotional power. Nothing in the service was slighted, every phrase and gesture had its full value. (149-50)

At Agua Secreta, the decoration of the altar with candles and flowers receives as much emphasis as the Mass and the four sacraments (30). Through the figure of Sada, the devout Catholic woman who serves a Protestant family, Cather attempts to explain this relationship of art and religion:

[The Archbishop] was able to feel, kneeling beside her, the preciousness of the things of the Altar to her who was without possessions; the tapers, the image of the Virgin, the figures of the saints, the Cross that took away indignity from suffering and made pain and poverty a means of fellowship with Christ. (217)

Father Vaillant, the priest who is described as "like the early saints of the early church, literally without personal possessions" (277), is rewarded for his devotion by rich vestments hand made for him by his sister and her convent in France, and the young prisoner

who is to be executed for killing his opponent at a cock-fight, spends his last days making a little pair of buckskin boots for the little Santiago in his home church (249-50).

Even the Virgin reveals herself to the people of New Mexico through a work of art in the Miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe. She appears to the poor priest Juan in December, and requests that he carry his mantle to the Bishop, full of roses. When he opens this, they discover a picture of the Virgin painted on the coarse material in rich colours of rose, blue and gold, and this painting, preserved miraculously in the shrine on the site, has amazed many painters who have come to marvel at the fine quality of the painting on the clumsy material (47-9). The painting of El Greco's St. Francis, too, becomes a revelation to the peoples of the New World. In the Prologue Marcia de Allande tells of the missionary priest who comes to his grandfather's house to beg for money, chalices, and linens for his mission church among the Indians and chooses not the poorest painting but the best. When the grandfather objects, the missionary replies, "You refuse me this picture because it is a good picture. It is too good for God, but it is not too good for you" (12). The priest suggests that in the service of God, the highest quality of art and culture alone is acceptable. Painting then is a form of devotion, and the transfer of culture to the New World is achieved by the transfer of its religious objects which are also treasures of art.

There is, however, a second set of art references in Death Comes for the Archbishop, domestic art, which is related to religious art through its contribution to the culture of the New World and

through its connection to the life of the central figure, Jean Marie Latour. Thus the comforts of the salon have their place even in the raw crude world of the desert, and the new civilization must absorb the domestic traditions of its ancestors to create a new culture of its own, the theme which becomes the organizing centre of Shadows on the Rock.

The whole of the Dona Isabella section is included primarily to suggest this life of gracious living even on the new frontier. Its connection to the plot is tenuous; Senor Olivares has willed money to the Cathedral fund in a codicil, and the will is contested by his relatives on the theory that his wife is too young to be the mother of his daughter. Eventually Dona Isabella confesses to her age publicly, renouncing the statement later.⁵¹ The section is in reality a short version of A Lost Lady, for the Olivares household is the centre of culture in Santa Fé, and the priests appreciate their company: "It was refreshing to spend an evening with a couple who were interested in what was going on in the outside world, to eat a good dinner and drink good wine, and listen to good music" (177). Their rambling adobe house is comfortable and even luxurious with its fireplaces and carved beams, its old mirrors and engravings, its upholstered chairs and Belgian glass and plate (177), and Senora Olivares like Mrs. Fields, and Marian Forrester, is a gracious hostess and an accomplished lady in the arts: "She spoke French well, Spanish lamely, played the harp, and sang agreeably" (176).⁵² A Kentucky girl who has been brought up in a French convent, she represents the gay social life of the world outside, owning "a whole chamberful of dresses so grand that she never

wore them here at all" (178). Like Marian Forrester she is suspected of numerous love affairs, even with Pablo, the little Mexican banjo-player, and her refusal to admit her age suggests too the frivolous nature of Marian Forrester. Her parties are famous in the surrounding country for their light and warmth, excellent food and varied music. The New Year's Party includes all the local society: several officers from the Fort, close friends of Latour's who are not mentioned elsewhere, Kit Carson and his wife, the priests, and Don Manuel Chavez, the dandy whose youthful sport has been hunting Navajos. Another party is given after the successful defence of the will, the wine glasses are dusted and filled with sherry and champagne, and the "brave widow" sings again to the accompaniment of the harp. The section thus provides a contrast to the usual associations of the priests with frontiersmen, peasants, Mexicans and natives, and contributes another form of culture to the variety of the frontier.

The second area of domestic culture in the novel relates to the life of the two priests, in particular to food and wine. Although their New World home is supposedly crude, it is described early in the novel in favourable terms, and it too illustrates a mingling of local arts with European crafts. The clay walls have "that irregular and intimate quality of things made entirely by the human hand" (34); the ceiling is of heavy cedar beams, the earth floor covered with Indian blankets, and the walls hung with other blankets "very old, and beautiful in design and colour" (34). The furniture is largely of hand-carved tree boles, the chests decorated with carving or leather-work. Latour later acquired silver-plate from his rich parishioners,

beautiful skins and blankets from Eusabio and other Indian friends, and linens for his clothing, bed and table, handstitched and lace-edged by the Mexican women (227).⁵³

It is, however, the references to food which receive the greatest emphasis in the transfer of culture to New Mexico. Latour believes that Vaillant is "scarcely acquisitive to the point of decency" (277) and objects that his greatest sacrifice in Denver is the lack of towels, salads and garden produce, butter and eggs, milk and fruit, as well as linens for sheets and table-cloths: "the stupid, unnecessary discomforts of his life in Denver. . . amounted to improprieties" (260). There are over ten meals in the novel, apart from references to native diet and cooking, and several of these are closely associated with religious ritual. At the rancho of Manuel Lujon where Vaillant goes to say confessions, to marry and christen, he arrives in time for wine and bread, goes into the kitchen after the ceremonies to cook his mutton to his own taste, enjoys his grape brandy and a game of dominoes by the fire, and leaves in the morning "after coffee" (57-9). At Agua Secreta, the emphasis of the description lies not upon the sacraments of the Church but upon the decoration of the altar, and the atmosphere of feasting, celebration and domestic harmony:

Benito and his daughter had made an altar before the sorrowful wooden Virgin and placed before it candles and flowers. Every soul in the village, except Salvatore's sick wife, had come to the Mass. He had performed marriages and baptisms and heard confessions and confirmed until noon. Then came the christening feast. José had killed a kid the night before, and immediately after her confirmation Josepha slipped away to help her sisters-in-law roast it. When Father Latour asked her to give him his portion without chili, the girl enquired whether it was more pious to eat it like that. He hastened to explain that Frenchmen, as a rule, do not like high seasoning, lest she hereafter deprive her-

self of her favourite condiment. After the feast the sleepy children were taken home, the men gathered in the plaza to smoke under the cottonwood trees. (30)

Indeed the two priests are preoccupied with food. They enjoy their first Christmas dinner cooked by Father Vaillant; this passage in Father Howlett is brief and in Death Comes for the Archbishop is expanded to six pages. They lament the lack of greens for salad and the quality of the wine: "It is not easy to separate these rich Mexicans from their French wine. They know its worth" (40). They envy the priests who are drinking the wine from their last parish: "that is a missionary's life: to plant where another shall reap", (39) and comment on the art of soup-making: "a soup like this is not the work of one man. It is the result of a constantly refined tradition. There are nearly a thousand years of history in this soup" (39). At Padre Martínez' Latour comments on the dinner: "he found the food poor enough, despite the many cooks, though the wine, which came from El Paso del Norte, was very fair" (145). There are two supper parties at Dona Olivares, and the dinner party of the glutton Father Gallegos, which is intended to suggest the extreme sin of gluttony, as a contrast to Latour and Vaillant, but which tends again to accentuate the theme of food and the salon at the expense of other aspects of life in the novel. Thus although we are told that Father Vaillant lives on simple fare in Denver, and that the missionaries of the New World must exist on buffalo meat and chili, in actuality the food of the novel suggests the richness of intermingled cultures, French and Spanish, Mexican, Indian and American.⁵⁴

The handicraft arts are introduced largely in connection with the

decoration of the altar, and the vestments of the priests. The Mexican women adorn the altar with laces and linens, make by hand wardrobes for the little Virgins which the men have carved, and present the priests with blankets and linens for their beds, table and personal needs. The Indian art is largely domestic and personal in contrast, and lacks the emphasis on its function as art, which is so important a part of pueblo art in The Song of the Lark and The Professor's House. Eusabio as a representative of Indian caste dresses elegantly in velvet and buckskin embroidered with quills and beads, a silver belt and a finely designed blanket, in fitting with his influential position among the Navajos as the owner of many horses and sheep. He wears also silver bracelets and necklaces of wampum turquoise and coral (220), and he and his friends have presented the priests with many skins and hand-woven blankets. In contrast, Jacinto's house, although whitewashed and clean, is bare except for a few fox pelts, several richly coloured blankets, and strings of gourds and red peppers, while his meal too is simple, in contrast with the priest's usual fare, of beans and dried meat and hot corn-bread with squash seeds. The native art of the Indians is not treated elsewhere; it relates neither to the Catholic culture of the novel nor to the domestic life of the priests, and thus is presented only as a form of local colour, and an expansion of the theme of multi-cultural development in the new frontier.

In Shadows on the Rock, Cather claims that the novel will not concern itself with action, movement or suspense, but "only" people and a lot of things".⁵⁵ In Death Comes for the Archbishop, she presents also people and things, but these things or art objects are

integrally related, by their connection to religious life and the aesthetics of the Catholic Church, and to the domestic life of the two priests about whom the novel is centred. But as Randall has pointed out, in these later novels, Cather's doctrine of art has narrowed to become a concern for trivial details of life like the ritual of soup or the ringing of a bell, a narrowing which is a distortion of Pater's concept of the beautiful to mere sensation.⁵⁶ The artists are no longer makers themselves, who express their ideas about the meaning of life in form and colour, or body movement or voice. They are connoisseurs, the Archbishop does not make the Cathedral but merely chooses the stone, and his enjoyment of his dinners suggests the empty gluttony of Fray Baltazar.⁵⁷ Latour is originally chosen for his qualities as a connoisseur; the Cardinal asks the missionary from the Great Lakes area: "Has your priest a versatile intelligence? Any intelligence in matters of art, for example?", and he relates the tale of the missionary from Pueblo de Cia who chose the best El Greco from his own grandfather's collection to take back to America. Since the destruction of the mission, it may be "hidden away in some crumbling sacristy of smoky wigwam" (13). He hopes that the new priest will have "a discerning eye" to recover this El Greco. Although there is no further mention of the incident, it does introduce Jean Marie Latour to us as a possible connoisseur, and the cataloguing of native handiwork and Mexican design which he enjoys for his house, his church and his person bears out this interpretation.

In her last novels, then, Cather's treatment of art and the artist has changed radically in harmony with her desire in religion

for peace and security. Art is something to appreciate and to take joy in, but it is no longer an ideal to suffer for, a mission for which to renounce the world. It is an inheritance from both the Old World and the New, but the artist is now the man who brings these two together and resolves their differences; he is no longer the saint who sacrifices his enjoyment of life and things for the perfection of an ideal.

Man and Religion: "something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change" (98).

It is in the religious aspects of Death Comes for the Archbishop that the similarity of technique to the frescoes of Puvis de Chavannes is most evident, for the religious incidents and portraits are truly "without accent", the trivial details of daily life mingled with the basics of existence, the mood predominant, and the conflicts muted so that the tales and figures merge into the setting and exist not independently but in association with the whole.⁵⁸ The religious life of the novel is presented in several patterns or groups: the lives of the two central characters, and their daily activities and thoughts; the tales of the local priests and bishops which expand their characterization through comparison or contrast; the ritual, sacraments and art of the Catholic church in America; the tales of legends and miracles in the New World; the religious beliefs and lives of the simple and devout Mexicans, and finally the traditions and ritual of the Indians themselves which are based on tradition, order, and a desire for stability in a changing world. All of these patterns evolve through the narrative structure of the novel, and all reflect the varieties of

human religious experience as well as the basic uniformity of its search for security through faith. That the religious experience is not primarily Catholic, nor even necessarily Christian, may be surprising in view of Cather's choice of two Catholic priests as her heroes, but is not out of keeping with her concern in her other novels for religion as a centre of humanism and as a source of order and meaning in life similar to the order she has found previously in nature and art.⁵⁹

The Catholic traditions and culture of the novel are developed through the ritual and art of the church, the references to the sacraments and other religious ceremonies and observances, through the worship of Mary and through the legends and miracles of the church, as well as through the portraits of individual churchmen who are strongly allegorical and who typify one particular religious sin or virtue. The sacraments are treated briefly, and usually in association with the decoration of the altar and with domestic culture. The seven Catholic sacraments of baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony are mentioned throughout the novel on different occasions but they do not form an order or pattern, and they play little part in the theme or structure of the novel, as do for example the soup and salad which represent the transfer of domestic culture from France to the New World. At Agua Secreta, the four sacraments of marriage, baptism, confession and confirmation are performed in few more words, and the emphasis of the passage is upon the decoration of the altar which precedes these ceremonies, and the feast which follows them (30). At the rancho of Manuel Lujon, the

sacrament of marriage is performed: "The household crowded into the sala, and Father Vaillant married couples with great dispatch" (57), while the baptism of their children the next morning is not described at all. The remainder of the nine pages describes Vaillant's arrival and rest with bread, wine and coffee (55), the preparation of the altar, the fellowship of the evening with a game of dominoes and coffee or grape brandy by the fire (59), the preparation of the feast, Vaillant's roasting of his own leg of lamb (57-8) and his enjoyment of its delicate pinkness and the white Bordeaux wine brought from Mexico on mule-back, and finally the incident of the two mules the colour of pearls which Vaillant persuades Manuel Lujon to give to him and Latour for the service of the church. The Mass at Taos is presented through the description of the altar lace, the polished brass, the choir boys and the rich baritone of Father Martínez (149-50), and the death Mass for Father Lucero becomes farcical, with its emphasis not upon ceremony but upon the attempts of Father Lucero to cling to the things of this world: "Oh why did not God not make some way for a man to protect his own after death?" (168). Vaillant dies offstage, and Latour describes his funeral in retrospect, placing emphasis upon the thousands of people who crowded to the ceremony and the arrival of his dying Vicar to bid him farewell. Of Latour's approaching death, we hear much but it is largely reminiscent and concerns his memories of his own experience and Vaillant's. Of church ceremony we learn only: "The sick man received the Viaticum early in the morning" (298). Thus the novel is not Catholic in its concern for the central sacraments of the Church and its emphasis upon their importance.

The Catholic observance of Mary is the most significant aspect of worship in the novel, and this emphasis suggests that Cather's primary concern is humanistic. Almost the only reference to Christ and his passion can be found in the opening book where Latour becomes thirsty in the midst of the desert and meditates upon the anguish of Christ upon the Cross to blot out his own consciousness. Indeed the uniqueness of the experience in the novel suggests that it is one of the incidents taken directly from Cather's source, Father Howlett. The worship of Mary, in contrast, forms a definite pattern in the images and themes of the novel. Even in the desert scene, Latour appeals to Christ on the human level to help mitigate his physical thirst, and the very qualities which he admires in Christ are the human qualities of the hero; endurance, courage and devotion. These human qualities may be presented more clearly through Mary, the mother of Christ, for she is purely human while her son is God-in-man, the Omnipotent in human flesh and therefore unattainable in human terms. Latour expresses the basis of Mariolatry in his comment on Sada's need for Mary in her worship before the Lady Chapel:

He seemed able to feel all it meant to her to know that there was a Kind Woman in Heaven, though there were such cruel ones on earth. Old People, who have felt blows and toil and known the world's hard hand, need, even more than children do, a woman's tenderness. Only a Woman, divine, could know all that a woman can suffer. (217)

To Mary, the mother of God, Vaillant has dedicated his career as a missionary, and each year he worships her in his May devotions. Even in the Puy-de-Dome he had worshipped her despite the disapproval of the older priest, and his sister had sent him artificial flowers for the altar from her nunnery (204). Even the scent of the earth coming to

life in the apple and cherry blossoms, and the spring sunshine are associated with Mary; every May "this sinful and sullied world puts on white as if to commemorate the Annunciation, and becomes, for a little, lovely enough to be in truth the Bride of Christ" (204). And through the grace of Mary, Vaillant has been given strength to leave his old country, his father and sister, for the missions of the New frontier (204).⁶⁰

The people too worship the image of Mary. The altar of Agua Secreta is placed before the "sorrowful wooden Virgin" (30); the Mexican women dress the little nursery Virgins in laces and robes, and the jewellers make her silver and gold chains and brooches (256). Here she plays the role both of object of worship and doll, a visible image of invisible love, "something to fondle and something to adore, as Mary's son must have been to her" (257). She appears also in the legend of Brother Juan and of the appearance to Father Junipero of the Holy Family, as the beautiful young Mexican mother with her small baby playing with a pet lamb (280-1). Much of the religious atmosphere of the novel is created by these references in legend and tale, symbol and image and worship, to Mary, and this perhaps accounts for the acceptance of Catholic critics that the book conveys an excellent rendition of Catholicism.

The presentation of Catholic culture on the new frontier is achieved also through the inset tales and legends in Death Comes for the Archbishop, which expand the religious experience of the novel in breadth and suggest that Latour's life has been fuller and more active than we have directly observed. Vaillant and Latour differ in

their interpretation of miracles; Vaillant expresses the emotional effect upon the poor and lowly:

What a priceless thing for the poor converts of a savage country! All these poor Catholics who have been so long without instruction have at least the reassurance of that visitation. It is a household word with them, that their Blessed Mother revealed Herself in their own country, to a poor convert. Doctrine is well enough for the wise, Jean; but the miracle is something we can hold in our hands and love. (49-50)

Bishop Latour's reply suggests his intellectual bias, and indeed a certain amount of Protestant scepticism as to the physical possibility of miracles similar to that of Auclair in Shadows on the Rock. Earlier he has conceded that his discovery of Agua Secreta in the midst of the arid desert has been a miracle but not a spectacular one in opposition to the laws of nature (29), and here he comments:

An apparition is human vision, corrected by Divine Love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices of healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what there is about us always. (50)⁶¹

The first miracle is the legend of Mary's appearance to the poor neophyte Juan Diego to request that a shrine be built to her upon this site; as a sign of her appearance she sends him to the Bishop with his mantle filled with roses in the month of December, and with a painting of herself in rose, blue and gold, which is preserved in the shrine by the grace of the Virgin. The tale is presented through the narration of Padre Escolastico Herrera, who seems to be introduced only for the purpose of its narration, but it is not verified by either Latour and Vaillant.

The remaining miracles are introduced in the last Book through

the memory of the dying Archbishop, although he has heard of them many years earlier as a young priest. Several relate to the experience of Father Junipero, a young Franciscan missionary who, on one journey is shown where to ford a treacherous river by a mysterious stranger, and on another is given pomegranates by a young horseman, to revive him and his companions from weakness and thirst in their journey across a barren plain. Finally in crossing a huge stretch of desert, Father Junipero is given food and lodging by a poor Mexican shepherd, his beautiful wife and a small infant who plays with his lamb and who makes the sign of the cross on the Father's forehead. This last legend links the New World with the Catholic heritage of Europe, and tells of the great blessing "that They, after so many years of history and glory, should return to play Their first parts, in the persons of a humble Mexican family, the lowliest of the lowly, the poorest of the poor, --in a wilderness at the end of the world" (282-3).

These legends, as a group, enrich the presentation of Catholic culture in the novel. Although their emphasis on simplicity and domesticity is at times sentimental, even rather shallow like the Sunday-School tales in Shadows on the Rock, they contribute breadth if not depth, and present another variety of religious experience to the survey of the novel.

The major religious experience of Death Comes for the Archbishop is presented through the theories and beliefs of Father Joseph Vaillant, who is a devoted religious man as well as a hero of nature.⁶² In Howlett's account, Machéboeuf was actually the major figure, and Cather has had difficulty in minimizing his role so that Latour becomes the

centre of interest; he built one hundred and four churches, brought sixty-four priests and three thousand children to the Catholic schools, and was Vicar Apostolic of Colorado and Utah, and first Bishop of

Denver.⁶³ The direct contrast between the mission of the two occurs in Part VIII where Jean Latour shows Vaillant the rock for his new cathedral and Vaillant wonders "why he had been called home from saving souls in Arizona, and . . . why a poor missionary Bishop should care so much about a building" (245). While he too wants a cathedral, he does not care whether it is Midi Romanesque or Ohio German. When the Bishop wishes to detain him further to see his lotuses in bloom, Vaillant explains he must return immediately:

To hunt for lost Catholics, Jean! Utterly lost Catholics, down in your new territory, towards Tucson. There are hundreds of poor families down there who have never seen a priest. I want to go from house to house this time, to every little settlement. They are full of devotion and faith, and it has nothing to feed upon but the most mistaken superstitions. They remember their prayers all wrong. They cannot read. . . . A mere contact is enough to make them a living part of the Church. The more I work with the Mexicans, the more I believe it was people like them our Saviour bore in mind when he said, Unless ye become as little children. . . . A word, a prayer, a service, is all that is needed to set free those souls in bondage. I confess I am covetous of that mission. I desire to be the man who restores these lost children to God. It will be the greatest happiness of my life. (206-7)

In contrast Latour remarks, "I tell you Blanchet, I would rather have found that hill of rock than have come into a fortune to spend in charity" (245).

Vaillant risks his life many times for his people, surviving disease and suffering to bring the sacraments to his flock. Unlike Latour he is able to live simply, without linens or dairy and vegetable produce. He enjoys the fellowship of the people, and is "not happy for

long without human intercourse" (227). He speaks both English and Spanish incorrectly and with no "vanity about grammar or refinement of phrase. To communicate with peons, he was quite willing to speak like a peon" (226). He is fond of his wine and his dinner, yet Latour observes that he never complains about the fasts to the Church or the diet on his long hard journeys. Even his relish for wine is explained as a desire for a quick physical stimulant; "Time and again the Bishop had seen a good dinner, a bottle of claret, transformed into spiritual energy under his very eyes" (226). And although he begs for the Church, his only possession is his mule Contento, and Latour believes he is "scarcely acquisitive to the point of decency" (227). In contrast, Latour describes himself as "much cooler and more critical in temper; hard to please, and often a little grey in mood" (225). In reality, Machéboeuf outlived Lamy, and the funeral of Vaillant which Latour recalls on his deathbed is then moved forward to allow the stress to be placed upon Latour.

Apart from Vaillant, there are many secondary priests in the novel who function similarly to expand the religious experience of the central character Jean Marie Latour. These priests and missionaries, whether they appear in insets and tales or in direct encounter with Latour, suggest the variety of characters and qualities in those men who are supposedly devoted to the Catholic church and to its mission in the new diocese. The characterizations are simplified and flat, almost allegorical; they break into two groups, those who exemplify the good in the Church and who are little developed, and those who typify the sins of mankind in the priesthood and who function as a contrast

to Latour and Vaillant and accentuate their positive qualities. Again these portraits do not provide depth, but an overall view of the varieties of religious experience, whether negative or positive. In each case, where a conflict seems to be developing, Cather in accordance with her statement that the novel is non-dramatic evades the issue, and resolves the situation through the technique of time, a solution not possible to the priests themselves.

Padre Gallegos represents worldliness, and is the present priest at Alberque and Ácoma. He is first described before we meet him as a rich man whom Lujon respects: "He is a great gambler and takes all his losses like a man. He stops at nothing, plays like an American" (59). The people find him "genial and popular" (82), and he enjoys playing poker and hunting, dining with a rich Mexican widow who makes him laces and linens, and dancing the fandango with the Mexican people. His religious duties are slight; he confirms all infants at baptism to save time, has given up celebrating the Mass at Ácoma as the Indians are unregenerate heathens, and receives Latour with a bandaged foot, so that he need not attend him on a tour of the missions where the bed will be hard and the food scarce (83). Although the Bishop finds he is engaging, he is nevertheless suspended from office for his worldliness, and the problems of the Parish, the resulting bitterness and resentment of the people is dismissed easily: "The fickle Mexican population soon found as much diversion in being devout as they had once found in being scandalous" (117). His worldliness thus accentuates the austerity and devotion of Vaillant and Latour.

Padres Martínez and Lucero, who represent sensuality and avarice,

are first introduced by Kit Carson:

Our Padre Martínez at Taos is an old scapegrace, if there ever was one; he's got children and grandchildren in almost every settlement around here. And Padre Lucero at Arroyo Hondo is a miser, takes everything a poor man's got to give him a Christian burial. (76)⁶⁴

The first description of Martínez develops this suggestion of vitality, energy and above all, sensuality:

He gave the impression of being an enormous man. His broad, high shoulders were like a bull buffalo's, his big head was set definitely on a thick neck, and the full-cheeked, richly-coloured, egg-shaped Spanish face. . . a high, narrow forehead, brilliant yellow eyes set deep in strong arches, and full, florid cheeks. . . . His mouth was the very assertion of violent, uncurbed passions and tyrannical self-will; the full lips thrust out and taut, like the flesh of animals distended by fear or desire. (140-1)

His house is in disorder, books heaped on chairs and tables and covered in dust, books, hats and coats in corners, and overrun by giggling serving-women and yellow cats whom Martínez feeds at the table. Latour is revolted by a dark bunch of woman's hair which is blown across the room by the night wind. Politically he is an intriguer, dealing in bribery and corruption, and he is believed to have instigated the revolt of the Taos Indians, promising to aid seven Indians who were to be hung if they would deed him their land and leaving town after the deeds were completed (140). His theological views too echo his personality: he considers celibacy and continence outmoded, rejects the authority of Rome, claiming native origins for the Mexican Catholic church and disputing the imposition of European Catholicism on native traditions and rites (148). Finally he advocates sin for priests in order to enlarge their understanding of grace and to make religion emotional rather than logical, an argument which suggests Satan's advice to Eve in Paradise Lost.

But Martínez is admired by Latour for his intellectual perceptions, his attachment to the land and to aestheticism and culture. His service is beautiful, his choir trained, his altar decorated, his singing of the service a true baritone: "Nothing in the service was slighted, every phrase and gesture had its full value" (150). His personality is compelling, with "a disturbing, mysterious, magnetic power" (150), and he is widely read not only in the Church fathers but in the Latin and Spanish classics (153). He too is quietly disposed of. Latour evades the problem for the moment, as the people are devout and attached to him, and a year later; "At the Bishop's suggestion, Padre Martínez formally resigned his parish" (159) (a highly improbable event, considering his character). And although he organizes a schismatic church, he dies conveniently shortly after (162). Martínez represents sensuality and incontinence; the details of his household, the giggling women and cats, even the rather showy singing of the Mass suggests these qualities although neither Latour nor Cather herself admit this last. Thus he is a foil for Vaillant and Latour, and stresses by negative example their continence and their sense of order. Martínez, the rebel and tyrant, is removed in a sentence, and the Catholic church under Latour remains triumphant in New Mexico.

A clearer example of sensuality is presented in Trinidad, the supposed nephew of Father Lucero, although the portrait is shallower than that of Martínez and more static. Trinidad eats mutton stew "as if he were afraid of never seeing food again", and gazes greedily at the serving-girl, and his sensuality is quite explicit: "The student

gave the impression of being always stupified by one form of sensual disturbance or another" (145). His face is fat and "irritatingly stupid" with "the grey, oily look of soft cheeses" (145). His religious observances too are sensual, almost erotic; in Passion Week he scourges himself "so full of cactus spines that the girls have to pick him like a chicken" (149), and he tries to crucify himself, hanging on a cross all night and requesting that he be scourged with cactus whips until he becomes ill from the poison (154-5). He represents too religious extremism; that Cather does not introduce any such ceremonies during Passion Week for her central characters suggests her rejection of asceticism in favour of a full life.

Father Lucero, an associate of Martinez, is referred to as a miser early in the novel by Kit Carson but not presented until his death. The portrait is farcical and his qualities caricatured.⁶⁵ His house is bare except for a bed, a crucifix and a bean-pot, and he keeps only one mule, wearing Martínez' cast-off garments and saving brooms after the Mexican housewives had thrown them out (160-1). During his final illness, he stabs with a carving knife a young thief looking for his hidden riches. Although Lucero is administered the sacraments upon his death-bed, his main concern is for his money and he laments, "Oh, why did God not make some way for a man to protect his own after death?" (168). And he dies in a convulsion with the cryptic words, "Eat your tail, Martínez, eat your tail!" (171) which is interpreted as his dying vision of Martínez in Hell. After his death they find hidden twenty thousand dollars in American money, in old coins of gold and silver in French, Spanish, American and English

currency, largely to be spent in masses for his soul (171-2).

Finally, there is the story of Fray Baltazar, a priest who lived in Ácoma in the early seventeenth century, narrated by Father Jesus. This priest represents the sin of pride and gluttony, and he firmly believed "the pueblo of Ácoma existed to support its fine church" (104). He lived in the grand style, dining off the best of the Indian corn, beans, squashes and mutton, and the produce of his garden which is watered by women who climbed up to the mesa every day, on fish from Sandia and rabbits from Zuni and wine brought, cooked and served by the natives. But at a dinner for neighbouring padres, he threw a pewter mug at the serving-boy who had spilled hot gravy on the senior priest from Zuni, and killed him. The other priests escaped, but Baltazar stayed with his garden which was just at its prime, and when the moon rose, several men from Ácoma climbed the rock and dropped him over the cliff, three hundred and fifty feet high. The church was not defiled but the Ácomas enjoyed watching the grapes and peachtrees wither for lack of water (103-114). The length of the tale indicates that it is of some importance in the novel. Although Baltazar represents the sin of gluttony, and of manipulating the natives to serve his own lusts, thus forming a contrast with the less sinful gluttony of Latour, the appeal of the story for Cather no doubt lies in the planting of the garden and the tending of the cuisine, the success of Fray Baltazar in transferring to the crude frontier at the top of the mesa, the arts and culture of Europe.⁶⁶

These evil priests then, although frequently one-dimensional and static, almost allegorical, amplify by contrast the characters

of Vaillant and Latour and cast light upon their virtues. References to the good priests operate in a similar manner, but these are rare and undeveloped, with little use of narrative or legend, which might draw attention from the central characters. Their roles are simple and confined. The missionary bishop of the Prologue who comes from the "icy arms of the Great Lakes" (6) is introduced only briefly, to present the argument for the choice of Latour as Bishop of the new diocese, and to prepare us for the demands of civilization on the frontier. Padre Jesus de Baca of Isleta appears at several points through the novel and tells us the legend of Fray Baltazar. His house is clean and bare, in contrast to Martínez', and he lives simply, with only an Indian girl to prepare his beans and cornmeal, his garden where he domesticates cactus plants, and his parrots which he raises for Indian ceremonies: "The old man was poor, and too soft-hearted to press the people for pesos" (85). He is simple too, almost child-like, and full of superstitions, yet "there was a quality of golden goodness about him" (86). His only real possession is a little wooden parrot, bought from an Indian whose ancestors had brought it from their mother pueblo long ago, perhaps brought from tropical Mexico. Thus he is connected with native history and culture, and unites the Catholic traditions of European with the native traditions of the New World. The Spanish fathers, heroized by the dying Archbishop for their courage and endurance which excelled that of Old World martyrs, are not named individually (277-8), and Father Junipero and Juan Diego, are presented only at second-hand by mission priests who recount the story of their miracles. These priests then supplement the portraits of Vaillant

and Latour and amplify them without detracting attention from their role as central in the novel.

But the religious pattern of Death Comes for the Archbishop is much richer than the recreation of European Catholic tradition and culture, and includes not only Mexican Catholicism, a variant of the religion brought by the Spaniards to the New World in the fifteen hundreds and become native, but also the Indian religions which are partially grafted on to Catholicism, partly in opposition to it.⁶⁷ Although Cather claimed that one incentive to write the novel had been her belief that "the story of the Catholic church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories", her immediate concern is for the art and culture of the native Mexican church, the frescoes, the figures of the saints, the adobe walls and hand-carved beams, and she concludes "the people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way [of telling what they felt] and left their message".⁶⁸ And the depiction of Mexican Catholicism in the novel bears out this concern, for the people are presented almost wholly through their religious art. Their religious life is oversimplified; although the missionary priest in the Prologue indicates that the Mexican church is in decay, its priest, dissolute and embroiled in political intrigue, he too presents the Mexican peoples as one-dimensional and naive, "a naturally devout people. Untaught and unshepherded, they cling to the faith of their fathers" (8). And Bishop Latour meditates in Agua Secreta:

This settlement was his Bishopric in miniature; hundreds of square miles of thirsty desert, then a spring, a village, old men trying to remember their catechism to teach their grandchildren. The

Faith planted by the Spanish friars and watered with their blood was not dead; it awaited only the toil of the husbandmen. (32)

Of all the cultures in Death Comes for the Archbishop, the Mexican culture is most sentimentalized. There are no major Mexican characters like Spanish Johnny of The Song of the Lark or even like Eusabio, Jacinto or Kit Carson in this novel. And the rather saccharine picture of life in Agua Secreta summarizes for us the view of Mexican life and religion which we are given in the novel: the Garden of Eden which parallels in the Mexican world the refuge of the Navajos in their Canyon. The white of the Angora goats suggests to the Bishop the Apocalypse where men are washed white in the blood of the lamb. Even their religion is domestic; their Virgin is a sorrowing mother, dressed like a poor Mexican woman in black with a white apron and black kerchief, while their Saint Joseph resembles a Mexican ranchero in embroidered velvet trousers and jacket, richly embroidered, and a silk shirt (28). Magdalena and Sada suggest the simple, stereotyped figures which Cather presents here as Mexican, and even the rich Manuel Lujon, is simple in mind and faith. Bullied out of his two beautiful white mules by Father Vaillant, who desires them largely for aesthetic reasons, he is persuaded to say with simple pride: "There go my Bishop and my Vicario, on my beautiful cream-coloured Mules" (63).

The treatment of Indian religion is much more complex, and indeed, ambiguous, for Cather does not resolve the central dilemma, the reconciliation of European Catholicism with native beliefs and traditions which are clearly pagan. The problem is faced clearly by

the outlawed priest Father Martínez of Ácoma:

You are a young man, my Bishop. . . . And you know nothing about Indians or Mexicans. If you try to introduce European civilizations here and change our old ways, to interfere with the secret dances of the Indians, let us say, or abolish the bloody rites of the Penitentes, I foretell an early death for you. I advise you to study our native traditions. . . . The dark things forbidden by your church are a part of Indian religion. (147-8)

His prophecy is not fulfilled, but then Father Latour does not succeed in imposing European Christianity upon the natives in full. Zeb Orchard, a trader who lives near the Pecos pueblo, says in effect the same thing:

"No white man knows anything about Indian religion, Padre. . . . The things they value most are worth nothing to us. They've got their own superstitions, and their minds will go round and round in the same old ruts till Judgement Day!" . . . The trader told him he might make good Catholics among the Indians, but he would never separate them from their own beliefs. (134-5)

The Bishop partially accepts this theory, for he declares their veneration for old customs was a quality he liked (135), and he accepts Jacinto's beliefs, refusing to question him about them:

There was no way he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him. (92)⁶⁹

To Jacinto's remark that the stars are "leaders--great spirits", the Bishop replies "Whatever they are, they are great. Let us say Our Father and go to sleep, my boy" (93). Thus he evades the problems of religious differences, and imposes Christian ritual upon a basically pagan discussion.

Yet the Indian ritual is presented, at times, as terrifying, basically alien to the Western mind. Even the Mass at Ácoma suggests that these people are non-human, timeless, even "reptilian". The Church

itself is "more like a fortress than a Church" and overhangs the cliff to become almost a part of the rock itself:

He felt as if he were celebrating Mass at the bottom of the sea, for antediluvian creatures; for types of life so old, so hardened, so shut within their shells, that the sacrifice on Calvary could hardly reach back so far. Those shell-like backs behind him might be saved by baptism and divine grace, as underdeveloped infants are, but hardly through any experience of their own. (100)

He was on a naked rock in the desert, in the stone age, a prey to homesickness for his own kind, his own epoch, for European man and his glorious history of desire and dreams. Through all the centuries. . . this people had been fixed, increasing neither in numbers nor in desires, rock-turtles on their rock. Something reptilian he felt here, something that had endured in immobility, a kind of life out of reach, like the crustaceans in their armour. (103)

These are supposedly Christian converts, yet Latour sends them away "with a sense of inadequacy and spiritual defeat" (100). When the Bishop comes closer to some of the sacred non-Christian rites of the tribes his basic attitude is of repulsion and disgust. The legends of the Pecos tribe explain the dying of their tribe through low fertility, disease, and high infant mortality, by the tale that the best young men of the tribe serve a ceremonial fire, burning in a secret cave in the mountain and are thus sapped of their strength, and by the analagous legend of an enormous snake hidden in the mountains and fed with young babies (122-3). But it is the Cave of Pecos which suggests at once the deepest mystery and horror, like the Marabar Caves in Forster's Passage to India which reach up to dominate the sky and threaten to annihilate European civilization. The Cave has obvious sexual connotations; its lips are stone, its air glacial and fetid, its darkness Gothic, and it hums like a hive of bees, the vibration of a subterranean river. The Bishop remembers this Cave

and Jacinto's mysterious actions in fitting stones and faggots into a round hole like a watermelon, and feels "a shudder of repugnance quite unjustified by anything he had experienced there" (133). Like Cécile after her visit to the Harnois, he escapes from the cave to the pure world of nature, unsullied by man:

The snow-clad mountains were red in the rising sun. The Bishop stood looking down over ridge after ridge of wintry fir trees with the tender morning breaking over them, all their branches laden with soft, rose-coloured clouds of virgin snow. (132)

These rites are never explained, or even referred to again, except for Zeb Orchard's remark that no white man can ever understand the religion and superstitions of Indians. They are dismissed abruptly, and there is no further conflict between Christian tradition and pagan observances. This dismissal recalls an incident described by Elizabeth Sergeant. One day she lent Cather a book on two white boys' initiation into a ceremony of Indian ritual and dancing, and Cather returned it coldly: "You forget, I am not interested in these things".⁷⁰

Yet there is another aspect of Indian religion which Cather finds not only parallels Christian religious experience but even illuminates it, and the Ácoma Indians express what seems to be Cather's own basic faith:

These Indians, born in fear and dying by violence for generations, had at last taken this leap away from the earth, and on that rock had found the hope of all suffering and tormented creatures--safety. . . . Sanctuary! . . . The rock, when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship. Christ Himself had used that comparison for the disciple to whom he gave the keys of His Church. And the Hebrews of the Old Testament, always being carried captive into foreign lands,--their rock was an idea of God, the only thing their conquerors could not take from them. . . . The Ácomas, who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent,

enduring, without shadow of change,--they had their idea in substance. They actually lived upon their Rock; were born upon it and died upon it. (97-8)

The Navajos too centre their faith in a rock, the Shiprock in the Canyon de Chelly which is like both parent and church to them and more sacred than any place to white men (295). Here their gods live in houses "older than the white man's world" (294-5). Although their gods have forbidden them to cross the boundaries of the Rio Grande, the Rio San Juan and the Rio Colorado, the Bishop recalls they were exiled for five years by the American government to unsuitable grounds, and allowed to return to their Canyon only after many died of bad water and poor pasturage for their sheep. After their return, the crops are once more planted between the high sandstone walls, the sheep grazing and drinking the fresh water; "it was like an Indian garden of Eden" (297).

Thus the Indian religion of the Ácomas and the Navajos is based on a desire for refuge and security, and on a veneration for tradition and the inheritance of the past, in common with European Christianity and Mexican Catholicism. In their own garden of Eden, whether Indian, Mexican in Agua Secreta, or European in the Bishop's garden, they find the perfection of their faith and achieve a feeling of permanence, of the end of their seeking in finding. The final story of the Navajo's exile and return thus reinforces the presentation of religious experience in the novel, and counterbalances the predominance of repulsive pagan rites in the earlier Books, conferring an apparent unity on all religious experience of all men.

In Death Comes for the Archbishop, Cather has approached a

new theme. Although Myra Henshawe turned to the Catholic Church as a refuge after her part in the culture and graces of New York society is lost through poverty, Cather's two priests are born into the faith and grow up knowing no real doubts or fears. Myra finds in the Church the only form of art that is available to the poor, but Latour chooses the Church as the true vehicle of art and culture around which he builds his life. Randall Stewart has called the work "the outstanding explicitly Christian novel"⁷¹ and D. H. Stewart finds it equal in challenge and complexity to Dante.⁷² Yet it raises many questions. Cather's "veneration for tradition" applies equally to Indian as to Catholic tradition, as Latour himself agrees (135). Indian rites are deliberately introduced but dismissed without real examination in the cavern episode, and Latour is able to avoid their unpleasantness as easily as Mrs. Harling avoids the predicament of the tramp who committed suicide in the threshing machine or Doctor Archie, that of the old man who threw himself into the water tank.⁷³ Daiches claims that the moral pattern is almost deficient, for Cather is warmly sympathetic to all but one murderer, and that she fails in projecting any sense of a missionary drive until Vaillant goes to Colorado; life remains much the same except for a certain amount of tidying.⁷⁴ And Randall objects that in Death Comes for the Archbishop, religion is made too easy for there is no renunciation. Latour is able to be both worldly and spiritual, sacrificing and retaining his comforts, rejecting human ties for the priesthood and yet finding here a fulfilment in the relationships of the mission.⁷⁵

Greene suggests that it is "religious" in a fuller sense,

that it reveals "the complexities of experience through a life of intellectual awareness, imaginative sympathy and moral discipline":⁷⁶

The novel "powerfully verifies the search for the moral self which energized Miss Cather's finest achievements"; in it she "studies the development of the esprit fort of Christian humanism under adverse conditions".⁷⁷ Yet the moral self is here not explicitly Christian.

It is more nearly humanist in its acceptance of all ritual and all tradition, of the role of the Church in human life and of Mary and Christ as supreme ideals of humanity, man and woman. In truth, the novel is religious in that it looks to religion, primarily (but not only) in the form of the Catholic Church, as a centre of order for human existence to replace nature and art which are not sufficient to satisfy Cather's quest. And in this sense, it fulfils its mission.

For Cather in writing the novel was completely happy, apart from the problems and trials, the illness and death and change which she found in the real world around her. With it she reached what Sergeant calls "the pinnacle of her literary career".⁷⁸ With the death of

her father, she turned again to religion and the past for security in Shadows on the Rock, but here she loses the breadth and sweep of the countryside, the variety of the races and creeds and manners of living, to retain only the sense of changelessness. And in choosing these elements, she sacrificed her art to her wish for a religion without stress "permanent, enduring, without shadow of change" (98).

14. SHADOWS ON THE ROCK:

The rock. . . was the utmost expression of human need. . . . The Ácomas, who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change,--they had their idea in substance. They actually lived upon their Rock; were born upon it and died upon it.¹

In a certain sense, Shadows on the Rock is the most explicitly religious of Cather's novels. Once again she approaches man's search for beauty and order through religion, for reassurance in the face of change and death. And she finds the answer in the late seventeenth civilization of a little French colony on the rock of Quebec. Here in the old established traditions and rituals of the French way of culture and the Catholic church, man could find security and some contentment in this life. Again as in Death Comes for the Archbishop, there are a variety of characters in life and legend, a variety of tales to illustrate the religious life of the era. But this novel, unlike Death Comes for the Archbishop, is shaped by the ritual of the religious year, and we observe the daily lives of people who are no longer "exceptional individuals" but ordinary human men and women. Even the tone of the novel is religious. The reason for this can perhaps be found in Cather's personal life, in the death of her father in March 1928, and the illness and approaching death of her mother during the period in which she was writing the book.² For the first time, Cather comes face to face with death, and the novel is an attempt to recreate a past happiness which is now truly possible no longer.

Yet there is something unreal about this novel. For Cather's

choice of the rock as her central symbol of religion suggests that she is looking for something which is not really there, some form of consolation similar to that of the Sunday school tales which Cécile tells Jacques. Geismar notes that the overall impression is that of a fairy-tale of the Church and the New World, a children's story whose spiritual vision is bounded by the limits of "that altogether safe, soothing, and ornamental universe of Cather's Ursaline sisters".³

Cather's original explanation of her choice of subject in her letter to Governor Cross suggests her primary concern at this time with safety and a refuge from the change and disorder of life in the twentieth century:

I tried, as you say, to state the mood and the viewpoint in the title. To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which many strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite. There, another age persists. There, among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me, a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire. . . . [I] tried to develop it into a prose composition not too conclusive, not too definite: a series of pictures remembered rather than experienced; a kind of thinking, a mental complexion inherited, left over from the past, lacking in robustness and full of pious resignation.⁴

This statement indicates what Cather is searching for in the Catholic Church, the church which has formed the culture of the peoples of Quebec. In Cather's earlier novels, the Catholic church was the centre of colour and gaiety; the Bohemians, the French, the Mexicans, even the Italians in London found in their religious ceremonies a sense of joy and vitality for living. But in Shadows on the Rock, there is only endurance and fortitude, a sense of waiting, and a clinging to the rock of faith in hopes of salvation from change and decay. Leon Edel points out that Cather's choice of the rock itself is curious; rocks

are "hard and singularly infertile; they symbolize stratification and rigidity". Yet to Cather they imply rather "durability, steadfastness, something to which one could cling".⁵

Quebec itself was, for Cather, a "psychic homeland"; the driving force of both Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock Elizabeth Sergeant finds in the author a "scarcely conscious pioneer longing to press on to a new frontier. New Mexico, New Brunswick and Quebec were. . . psychic homelands that her love and adventure had eagerly sought and embraced--almost fragments of her soul".⁶ But the choice of these regions is deeper than a mere physical longing for a lost frontier; they represent areas where traditions have been established and man lives a life close to nature and to the simple ritual of a hierarchical political, social and religious order. Louise Bogan in her article "American Classic" clarifies this:

[Cather] likes the French Canadians because they have remained unchanged for over two hundred years, Quebec because it is built to last, and because its buildings show the influence of French architecture of France's best period. Its inhabitants like good food and simple pleasures. They are almost indestructable in their racial traits, and Miss Cather admires indestructable qualities in human character. "Quebec would never have changed at all, she says, "if the American drunks had left it alone".⁷

The structure of the novel, like that of Death Comes for the Archbishop, rejects the normal dependence on plot, action, suspense for something "without accent", as Cather indicated to Mary Chase:

That's what the book is going to be--Shadows. They mean far more to me than mere substance. It won't have a trace of what is called movement or suspense. It will just have people and a lot of things.

In her letter to Governor Cross, Cather attempts to justify this treatment of an epoch in history where the little colonies of Europeans

were threatened on all sides, by the elements and the struggle for the very basics of human existence, by the Indians, even by other European nations:

An orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently, just as ants begin to rebuild when you kick their house down, interests me more than Indian raids or the wild life in the forests. . . . And really, a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of villages. Those people brought a kind of French culture there. . . tended it, and on occasion died for it, as if it really were a sacred fire.⁹

Although the novel is organized chronologically, following once more the pattern of the seasons which shapes life in the early novels of O Pioneers! and My Ántonia, there is no real climax. The turning point occurs during the second year when Cécile visits the Harnois and comes to recognize that she is the agent of transfer for French culture, that she observes the niceties not to please her dead mother, but for herself: "One made a climate within a climate; one made the days,--the complexion, the special happiness of each day as it passed" (197-8).¹⁰ On the flyleaf of Lucy Gayheart Cather was to write: "[for some] fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts--that and nothing more".¹¹ The climax of Shadows on the Rock is a spiritual climax, both for Cécile and for Cather herself. Life now is one of "pious resignation", and endurance, both in life and in death.

Tonally and thematically, the novel succeeds in expressing the attributes of stability and endurance in the face of conflict and change. But artistically, it is weak, for the denial of conflict means ultimately a denial of real life for a sentimental dream, as illustrated by the clichéd characters Pierre Charron, the noble woodsman with the

heart of gold, and Jacques, the saintly son of the town prostitute. Even in Quebec in 1660, a rock in the middle of the Saint Lawrence, life cannot be denied;-indeed its realities are more real, not less, as indicated in the inset tales of frontier life. As Kronenburger says, the novel is not sentimental; it is simply never real.¹²

Elizabeth Sergeant attributes certain faults to the choice of Cécile as central character: "One can have more than enough of a child heroine, however sage and efficient".¹³ But in My Ántonia and The Song of the Lark, it is precisely the emotions and perceptions of the children Jim and Thea which are most effective and most real. However, Miss Sergeant's other comment on the mood of the novel, its evasion of reality, is very perceptive:

[Shadows on the Rock] was again Catholic, again historical, and again revealed that devotion to and insight into French culture that had been almost a quality of her [Cather's] mind through the years. But by contrast with her nineteenth century missionaries, the late seventeenth century French exiles on the rock of Quebec looked minute, fixed, immobile, almost puny, in a state of suspension. They were conservationists, not builders or discoverers. The Roman Catholic Church and the French King had done the whole thing for them.¹⁴

In the novel, art has little place except in the preservation of domestic life and the preparation of food. While the Professor writes eight volumes of history and Latour at least selects the stone, the location and the architect for his cathedral, Auclair only preserves through a concern for absolute routine and order which at times approaches the farcical: "His dinner Auclair regarded as the thing that kept him a civilized man and a French man" (16-17). Religion too has lost its force. Although it seems to occupy a more important place here than in any other novel, although the year is shaped by

religious festivities and observances, it is the routine and order rather than the real faith which determines this atmosphere of piety; it is the heroism of the martyrs who suffer from their conquest of the wilderness, rather than their dedication to God, their disillusionment at the failure of their mission, which is important to the novel. But the central weakness of Shadows on the Rock is its basic antagonism to change. It looks to the past rather than to the future, as Sergeant implies. Auclair's comment, "I am very old-fashioned. I think the methods of the last century better than those of the present time. Change is not always progress, Monseigneur" (119), applies aptly to the Cather who will not have a radio in her apartment. And when during Cécile's illness, neighbours offer their help, Auclair replies: 'Mais non, nous sommes plus tranquilles comme ça'. . . . That was the important thing--tranquillity" (157). Such remarks, although unimportant in context, have a cumulative effect which gradually establishes the belief that tranquillity and resistance to change are the most important elements of life, and this surprisingly, from one of Cather's pioneers in a New World wilderness. Cather's pioneers have come a long way from Alexandra Bergson who shaped the wild land to her own needs!

The emphasis on continuity and preservation is achieved through the repetition of the words "same" and "unchanged" throughout the novel. The Auclair salon at the back of the little apothecary shop is the thematic centre of Shadows on the Rock in its role as preserver of the past, the Old World of French culture and of the niceties of life, in the new raw world of the uncharted continent:

The salon behind the shop was very much like their old salon in

Paris. There was the same well-worn carpet, made at Lyon, the walnut dining-table, the two large arm-chairs and high-backed sofa upholstered in copper-red velvet, the long window-curtains of a similar velvet, lined with brown. The same candelabra and china shepherd boy sat on the mantle, the same colour-prints of pastoral scenes hung on the walls. . . . As long as she lived, she tried to make the new life as much as possible like the old. (23)*

Ironically, it is New France which remains the same and changeless, apart from the Old World of corruption, the decadence of court and society which marked France's splendid seventeenth century:

[Auclair] believed that he was indeed fortunate to spend his old age here where nothing changed; to watch his grandsons grow up in a country where the death of the King, the probable evils of a long regency, would never touch them. (279-80)

The New World is now the refuge from evil, from change. Saint Vallier describes France after his return to Quebec:

At home the old age is dying, but the new is still hidden. I felt the same condition in England. . . . The changes in the nations are all those of the old growing older. You have done well to remain here where nothing changes. Here with you I find everything the same. (277)¹⁵

It is the decadence of the romantic sensibility, the final way of escape to the past where Age comes to signify change and youth stability; the Past, culture and the Present, a shallow materialism. The only hope for the American artist lies behind, says Wright Morris, in the new frontier to the West, the sea, the forest, the highway, where life remains close to nature and the best qualities of the old are preserved from the heritage of the new: "The territory ahead lies behind".¹⁶

Nature and Man: "an uncharted continent" (7)

In Shadows on the Rock, the order of nature is suggested as *being* subservient to the order of the Church in the nun's affirmation of order as a principle in God's benevolent universe:

*italics mine

[Here in Quebec] they had the same well-ordered universe about them; this all-important earth, created by God for a great purpose, the sun which he made to light it by day, the moon which he made to light it by night,--and the stars, made to beautify the vault of heaven like frescoes, and to be a clock and compass for man. And in this safe, lovingly arranged and ordered universe (not too vast, though nobly spacious) in this congenial universe, the drama of man went on at Quebec, just as at home, . . . (97)

Yet while the novel asserts that to the devoted Christian, the universe is congenial, decreed by a loving and benevolent God, to the remaining characters in the novel, nature is now something to dread, an alien environment which seeks to destroy human life and to extinguish the sacred fire of culture and even life on the rock of Quebec. The opening description is unique in Cather's fiction; it presents Nature not only as powerful and destructive, but as terrifying, even vampiric, choking the life out of its own creations and with them man himself who must struggle to fight against its encroachment on his domain:

The black pine forest came down to the water's edge; and on the west, behind the town, the forest stretched no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an uncharted continent choked with interlocking trees, living, dead, half-dead, their roots in bogs and swamps, strangling each other in a slow agony that had lasted for centuries. The forest was suffocation, annihilation; there European man was quickly swallowed up in silence, distance, mould, black mud, and the stinging swarms of insect life that bred in it. The only avenue of escape was along the river. The river was the only thing that moved, glittered, changed,--a highway along which men could travel, taste the sun and open air, feel freedom, join their fellows, reach the open sea. . . reach the world, even! (6-7)¹⁷

The Rock of Quebec, with its merging of the natural formation, the design of the buildings and cathedrals, and the religious aspirations of mankind, faces this forest of the natural world, and man builds his civilization, and struggles against nature for survival. The little French civilization, in its precarious position on the top of this

rock, asserts the necessity of art and culture, civilization and society, order and religious aspiration, against the raw, crude demands of the frontier. Looking down upon the beginnings of this entrenchment of European culture in the New World, Captain Pondaven wonders why:

The moon was high in the heavens, shining down upon the rock, with its orchards and gardens and silvery steeples. The dark forest and the distant mountains were palely visible. . . . Why should this particular cliff in the wilderness be echoing tonight with French songs, answering to the French tongue? He recalled certain naked islands in the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence; mere ledges of rock standing up a little out of the sea, where the sea-birds came every year to lay their eggs. . . while the winds howled around them, and the spray beat over them. This headland was scarcely more than that; a crag where for some reason human beings built themselves nests in the rock, and held fast. (225-6)

The heroes of this new frontier are those who strive with nature for their very existence and the preservation of their way of life; the woodsmen, the priests who brave the sinister forests for converts, the sailors who provide contact with the Old World. These last carry to the colonists the basic supplies of civilization with which to continue their struggle against the wilderness for another twelve months: "food, wine, cloth, medicines, tools, fire-arms, prayer-books, vestments, altars for the missions, everything to comfort the body and the soul" (209). Their ships have battled heroically the elements of the sea, high winds and mountainous waves, "a wilderness of hostile, never-resting water" (208), in which they almost lose their course, finally to arrive safely at their destination, the rock of Quebec:

Cécile wondered how they could ever find it,--a goal so tiny, out of an approach so vast. . . little wooden boats matched against

the immensity and brutality of the sea; the strength that came out of flesh and blood and goodwill, doing its uttermost against cold, unspending eternity. (208-9)

Against cold, winter, isolation and loneliness, man carves out his little society on the rock, and asserts himself over nature. And the old, rich culture is preserved in the new, alien world, like the little sprig of parsley for the cooking which Cécile manages to keep alive even in winter "when the grip of still, intense cold tightened on the rock as if it would extinguish the last spark of life" (26).

Yet despite these few vivid descriptions, nature in Shadows on the Rock functions largely as a set or backdrop for the action, rather than an integral part of the action or even a third character in the novel as in O Pioneers!, My Ántonia or even Death Comes for the Archbishop. Perhaps it is because the forests and hills are alien to Cather, brought up on the great American prairies, that the associations seem literary and acquired rather than personal. The novel is shaped by the seasons, from summer to winter, through spring, summer, winter and again spring, but the descriptions evoke the mood of shadow, endurance and resignation, with a predominance of autumn tones rather than the high colour of summer or winter. The novel opens with the approach of winter, the return of the ships to France and the temporary end of life and colour on the little rock of Quebec. The mood of reminiscence is strong and the descriptions suggest Orsino's "dying fall"; although effective pictorially, they lack the vigour and exhilaration of the Canadian autumn, the real flavour of the country which Cather conveys in her scenes of Nebraska:

Quebec is never lovelier than on the afternoon of late October;

ledges of brown and lavender clouds lay upon the river and the Île d'Orléans, and the red-gold autumn sunlight poured over the rock like a heavy southern wine. (33)

The glorious transmutation of autumn had come on; all the vast Canadian shores were clothed with a splendour never seen in France; to which all the pageants of the kings were as a taper to the sun. . . . So many kinds of gold, all gleaming in the soft, hyacinth-coloured haze of autumn; wan, sickly gold of the willows, already dropping; bright gold of the birches, copper gold of the beeches. Most beautiful of all was the tarnished gold of the elms, with a little brown in it, a little bronze, a little blue, even. (228-9)

The first of these passages is from the first autumn, the second a year later when Cécile has been initiated into the life of culture and the salon, but the tone of the passages is undifferentiated. Despite Cécile's youth and supposed vitality, the tone suggests the predominant note of sunset in Death Comes for the Archbishop. The winter which symbolically brings death to the world of nature and of man, is here more colourful and vibrant, more alive than summer:

Winter had come--the deepest reality of Canadian life. The snow fell all through the night of Saint Nicholas' Day, but morning broke brilliant and clear, without a wisp of fog, and when she stepped out of the door, the sunlight on the glittering terraces of rock was almost too intense to be borne. . . . When they reached the coasting-hill, the sun was already well down the western sky (it would set by four o'clock), and the light on the snow was more orange than golden; the long, steep street and the little houses on either side were a cold blue, washed over with rose-colour. (98-9)

Amid this "deepest reality" of life, Cécile plays happily on the sled beneath the Cathedral slope, has chocolate for supper, sits comfortably before the fire, and lives a remarkably comfortably domestic existence, so that the force of the phrase is blunted. We see little real experience of winter and its conditions, except through Blinker and through the inset narrative of Antoine Frichette, which thus functions to provide indirectly aspects of life which are never conveyed directly.

With the slow spring, the symbolism of the natural cycle is reasserted. Indeed death seems to be more closely linked to early spring than to winter, and only a miracle is possible to achieve a rebirth of life, to return the earth once more to fertility:

The snow darkened; everything grew grey like faintly smoked glass. The ice in the river broke up before Quebec, and olive-green water carried grey islands of ice and snow slowly northward. . . . The only colours in the world were black and grey. . . . After the interval of rain everything froze hard again and stayed frozen,--but no fresh snow fell. The white winter was gone. Only the smirched ruins of winter remained, mournful and bleak and impoverished, frozen into enduring solidity. . . . All through April those stumps and twigs were so forbidding, so black and ugly, that Cécile wondered whether anything short of a miracle of the old-fashioned kind could ever make the sap rise in them again. (155-6)

This paralleling of the miracle of nature to the miracles of the Church, its legends and tales, is explicit in the description of June which yearly realizes this hope of rebirth:

When the sun came up over the Île d'Orléans, the rock of Kebec stood gleaming above the river like an altar with many candles, or like a holy city in an old legend, shriven, sinless, washed in gold. The quickening of all life and hope had come which to France in May had reached the far North at last. (169)

But the second summer is short; thematically it is central to the novel, for it marks Cécile's initiation into the rites of culture and art, but it begins only with the arrival of the ships in Book V and ends before their departure in Book IV. The return of autumn and winter brings death, not only to nature, but to the colony of Quebec and the Auclair family with the death of Count Frontenac. Yet there is once more a promise of spring; although the year is close to its end, the sky is grey and the snow is falling, the return of Pierre Charron brings renewed life and hope, and the promise of a salvation which will be timeless. In the marriage of Cécile and Pierre, the order

of nature is united with the orders of art and religion, and the birth of their children in the Epilogue salutes the birth of the future generation in the New World Eden which is Quebec.

Thus the role of Pierre Charron as the natural Rousseauian aristocrat is vital to the meaning of the novel and the merging of the orders of art, nature and religion. Pierre's noble qualities are made quite explicit; he is the true Catherian hero with inborn piety, charm, wit, taste and common sense. We are prepared early for the important symbolic role he will play in the conclusion. Like Tom Outland, Ray Kennedy, and Kit Carson, he represents the New Order of the natural world, the frontier with its purity and its remoteness from corruption:

To both Auclair and Madame Auclair, Pierre Charron had seemed the type they had come so far to find; more than anyone else he realized the romantic picture of the free Frenchman of the great forests which they had formed at home on the banks of the Seine. He had the good manners of the Old World, the dash and daring of the New. He was proud, he was vain, he was relentless when he hated, and quickly prejudiced; but he had the old ideals of clan-loyalty, and in friendship he never counted the cost. His goods and his life were at the disposal of the man he loved or the leader he admired. Though his figure was still boyish, his face was full of experience and sagacity. (171-2)

Like Thea's voice, Pierre's qualities are explicated rather than demonstrated. The comment that he kept his conduct exemplary in Montreal and gave half his profits to his mother, leading a profligate life of drink, women and squandered money the remainder of the time, is quite incredible, even humorous.¹⁸ Indeed Pierre is a modernized and considerably watered-down version of Natty Bumppo, that irascible old hunter whom Cooper created before his romanticized Leatherstocking or Pathfinder.¹⁹ For Pierre too lives in isolation, away from the

comforts of society: "When you can go to an Indian feast and eat dogs boiled with blueberries, you can eat anything" (187). He prefers to live away from social rules, and denounces the encroachments of society into his natural domain as does Natty in The Pioneer and The Prairie:

Its a truth, monkey, I wouldn't like a country where things were too soft. I like a cold winter, and a hot summer. My father used to boast that in Langeudoc you were never out of sight of a field or a vineyard. That would mean people everywhere around you, always watching you! No hunting,--they put you in jail if you shoot a partridge. Even the fish in the streams belong to somebody. I'd be in prison in a week there. (188)

In the past, the Count has provided the centre of stability for the Auclairs, Auclair has come as a pioneer unwillingly: "He could not imagine facing any kind of life but the one he had always lived" (33). The death of the Count brings to an end the peace and order of life in the New World; Cécile "felt as if a strong roof over their heads had been swept away" (259), and Auclair responds to this death: "I do not wish to live beyond my time", and agrees with the Latin poets: "four times blessed were those to whom it befell to die in the land of their fathers" (261,3). But Cécile replies that she is not of the old world but of the new, and the arrival of Pierre, the noble man of nature, achieves the salvation of Quebec:

Never in her life had she felt anything so strong and so true, so real and so sure, as that quick embrace that smelled of tobacco and the pine woods and the fresh snow. . . . She had once more that feeling of security, as if the strong roof were over them again; over her and the shop and the salon and all her mother's things. For the first time she realized that her father loved Pierre for the same reason he had loved the Count; both had the qualities he did not have himself; but which he most admired in other men. (264-6)

He had not a throne behind him like the Count. . . , not the authority of a parchment and seal. But he had authority, and a power which

came from knowledge of the country and its people; from knowledge, and from a kind of passion. His daring and his pride seemed to her even more splendid than Count Frontenac's. (268)

Pierre's life of nature is never demonstrated in the novel.

As in Death Comes for the Archbishop, it is the minor characters who are developed through inset narratives, who illustrate the qualities and hardships of the hero. The tales of Antoine Frichette, Father Hector and Noel Chabanel are presented before we are really introduced to Pierre, but their life is his by analogy, and certain of his remarks recall similar experiences, as in the reference to dogs boiled in blueberries.

Antoine Frichette represents the simple aspect of woods life. Journeying three days to the Sault mission to fetch the priest for his dying brother, and three days back, he was caught in a blizzard and found shelter from the wind under a large white pine. While they lasted, he and the priest ate smoked eels and grease, with snow for water, and later, almost starving, they were fortunate to be given hares by a kind Indian. Through Antoine we see the physical discomforts of the life of the woods, the heroism and simple courage of those who brave nature, and also the attraction of the forest, for those who know the life, ~~over~~ the cultural comforts of civilization. For Antoine, woodsman by occupation, has suffered a rupture in this heroic mission, and he will no longer be able to carry or to do heavy work:

A man sits here by the warm fire, where he can hear the bell ring for mass every morning and smell bread baked fresh every day, and all that happened out there in the woods seems like a dream. Yet here I am no good anymore. . . . There is no future for me if I cannot paddle a canoe up the big rivers any more. (145)

Father Hector Saint-Cyr too points up the physical advantages

of city life, as against the hunger, deprivation and hardships of life in the woods, especially for the city man or the cultured. He is such a character as Willa Cather tried to create in the Archbishop; perhaps we are more ready to believe in his sacrifice because he is not a main character, and Cather's summarized narration is always more credible than her dramatic narrative. Father Hector enjoys Cécile's dinner of fish soup, wood doves in a mushroom casserole, wild rice and old Burgundy wine, as a contrast to his woods diet of cold eels and smoked lard. But he finds the solitude of the woods harder to bear than the physical and material disadvantages: "Others have their family; but to a solitary and an exile his friends are everything" (146). Like the Archbishop, too, he mourns the separation from his home which would give him nieces and nephews to watch, enjoy and plan for, but he is prepared to give up all these for a life in the wilderness in the service of God:

Very clearly, Euclide, it was arranged in Heaven that I should be a missionary in a foreign land. I am particularly susceptible to the comforts of the fireside and the charm of children. . . . No man can give himself heart and soul to one thing while in the back of his mind he cherishes a desire, a secret hope, for something very different. . . . Nothing worthwhile is accomplished except by that last sacrifice, the giving of oneself altogether and finally. (148-9)

This "last sacrifice" is represented by Noel Chabanel, the cultured missionary who became a martyr. While Frichette suffers from the physical deprivations of the woods, and Father Hector, the loneliness and solitude, the tale of Noel Chabanel includes these in a martyrdom which sacrifices both art and culture, even the sense of the presence of God: "his martyrdom was his life, not his death" (150).

A professor of rhetoric, a master of Greek and Hebrew, Italian and Spanish, he is unable to learn the Huron language and to communicate. He is nauseated by the vermin and mosquitoes, the smoky tents, the smell of dirty Indian bodies and dogs; he retches over the boiled flesh of dogs, and is taunted with the Indian stew, the hand of an enemy sticking out of it. Isolated even from God, he feels a return to France would mean a return to life: "to find again that peace of soul, that cleanliness and order, which made him the master of his mind and its powers" (152). But he dedicates himself to serve God in the wilderness of nature and corrupted natural men, and dies as a sacrifice: "No man ever gave up more for Christ than Noel Chabanel; many gave all, but few had so much to give" (153).

In contrast to these heroic men of nature are the Harnois who represent the corruption of the natural Rouseaunian into the fallen Adam; they symbolize those come to the New World for the wrong reasons, bringing not beauty and order but chaos and uncleanness. They have neither the virtues of the pioneers who challenge the wilderness, nor the orders and graces of civilization:

Many unserviceable men had come, to be sure, but they were usually adventurers who disliked honest work,--wanted to fight the Iroquois or traffic in beaver-skins, or live a free life hunting game in the woods. (16)

The Harnois live in a state of nature without culture or grace, and Cécile's visit to them proves to be her initiation into the adult world of order. The children sleep in dirty sheets in their dirty chemises, bathless, their legs covered in mud and blood from mosquito-bites (191). They wear no stockings, and refer to animal functions which

Cécile prefers to ignore (like Cather herself who writes of life while evading the basic facts of human existence in love and birth). Again we are given little first-hand detail of the Harnois' life, which is recreated through Cécile's response and the disgust which she feels for their ways: "Her mother had always made everything at home beautiful, just as here everything about cooking, eating, sleeping, living, seemed repulsive" (192). From the Harnois, Cécile escapes to the purity, cleanliness and beauty of uncorrupted nature:

She tried to think about the buttercups in the marsh, as clean as the sun itself, and the long hay-grass with the star-white daisies. . . . She felt she had escaped for ever from the Harnois and their way of living. She went to sleep and slept a long while. When she wakened up in the sweet-smelling grass, with the grasshoppers jumping over her white blouse, she felt rested and happy--though unreal, indeed, as if she were someone else. (192-3)

And so Nature, untouched by human society however natural, becomes again an escape from man and his ways. The earth and the daisies are clean as the sun (while the animals seem not to be!). Cécile believes the field of buttercups, which are "so clean and shining, their yellow so fresh and unvarying that they must have been born that morning at the same hour" (189) to be a real paradise on earth. Through this experience, Cécile learns that the function of art and culture is to make the natural life beautiful and orderly, and she summarizes her new wisdom:

They had kind ways, those poor Harnois, but that was not enough; one had to have kind things about one, too. . . . Dogs cooked with blueberries--poor Madame Harnois' dishes were not much better! These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and dishes, were tools, and with them one made. . . the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life. (197-8)

The marriage of Cécile, child of French culture and art, with Pierre Charron, son of the wilderness, will produce the hybrid children, the true Canadians of the New World which will combine the best qualities of both.²⁰ For unlike Auclair, Cécile chooses the New World with its new order, and the new culture built up in defiance of the elements: cold, winter, isolation, loneliness, lack of contact with the Old. Thinking of her father's return to France, Cécile comments:

On a foreign shore, in a foreign city (yes, for her a foreign shore), would not her heart break for just this? For this rock and this winter, this feeling of being in one's own place (104).

And her choice of Pierre, the natural man of this New World, represents her replacement of the old values of Count Frontenac with the new of Quebec. For it is in Pierre that the future lies; he looks to the future while Auclair and the Count look to the past:

He had authority, and a power which came from knowledge of the country and its people; from knowledge and from a kind of passion. His daring and his pride seemed to her even more splendid than Count Frontenac's. (268)

Man and Art: "A Sacred Fire",²¹

Cather's statement to Governor Cross that "a new society begins with the salad dressing more than with the destruction of Indian villages",²² indicates her preoccupation in Shadows on the Rock with culture, whether domestic or religious. Yet her treatment of art in the novel is the weakest of any since O Pioneers!. Her remark to Miss Chase that it will have no movement or suspense but "people and a lot of things",²³ is unfortunately realized in the novel, for the art references are disconnected and discursive, unified only through their

association with Cécile herself. The aesthetic theory is stated in Cécile's judgment on the Harnois: "They had kind ways, those Harnois, but that was not enough; one had to have kind things about one too" (197). These "kind things" then become the centre of life both in the church and the salon, and art is reduced to adornment and domesticity, playing with pots and pans on the level of the Ladies' Home Journal, as Trilling acridly suggests.²⁴

At the centre of the novel is the relationship of Cécile and her father Euclide Auclair, which Brown points out is basic to the conception of the novel. Cécile, he comments, is not fitted for a religious vocation but for domestic life; thus the life of the Auclairs provides a parallel to the Holy family which connects the life of domesticity with religious devotion--cooking, cleaning, polishing: "Religion also penetrated life and made it shine with grace and poetry".²⁵ Cécile is a descendent of Antonia and, as Bennett suggests, a domestic artist as truly as the German housewife who serves her family a good Thanksgiving dinner.²⁶ Her character is similar to her progenitors Antonia and Marie Shabata, yet she is less vital and we see her less objectively; she too suggests the dimness of shadow rather than the brightness of sunlight and fruit associated with Marie and Antonia. She is neither a narrator nor a wholly realized character; we see largely from her angle of vision yet we are detached, no longer involved in her perceptions as in the case of Jim Burden or Neil Herbert.²⁷

Cécile's culture is hers by inheritance, part of her fortune, and Jacques sees her little silver cup, with its engraved roses and her name, as a symbol of the life of "things", the stability of "place",

into which she has been born:

To have a little cup, with your name on it. . . even if you died it would be there, with your name. More than the shop with all the white jars and the mysterious implements, more than the carpet and curtains and the red sofa, that cup fixed Cécile as born to security and privileges. He regarded it with respectful, wistful, admiration. (87)

The sense of "our way" then is something one is born with; the desire for domestic art and order is not possible to Jacques nor to the Harnois; it is for the natural aristocrats alone.²⁸ Auclair too is born to this place. As a character he is even less realized than Cécile. He retains characteristics of the Catherian artist: the sensitivity, individuality, isolation, dedication and implied superiority; he has a "lively and inquiring spirit" but is not "a man of action" (7). Yet the only thing he creates is a herbarium, a record of the plants of the New World which he plans to take back to France when he returns. Where Carl would have sketched these, and Jim, Neil or Tom described them, Auclair only dries samples. He is a connoisseur of food, claiming his dinner "kept him a civilized man and a Frenchman" (16-17), but he bears little resemblance to Bartley Alexander, Professor St. Peter or even the Archbishop. The Catherian artist no longer makes but only preserves tradition and ritual of the past.²⁹

But Cécile inherits too from the Count who bequeaths her the glass fruit she always has admired as a symbol of the transfer of Old World culture to the New World: "glowing fruits of coloured glass: purple figs, yellow-green grapes with gold vine-leaves, apricots, nectarines, and a dark citron" (59). Even her presence in Quebec is due to the Count for "the accident of being born next the Count

de Frontenac's house in Paris had determined Euclide Auclair's destiny" (27).

Cather's Count Frontenac is the born Cather aristocrat even more clearly than Auclair. A soldier who "fought for no gain but renown, merciful to the Conquered, charitable to the poor, haughty to the rich and overbearing" (261), he represents this place and tradition, even the authoritarian political hierarchy which shelters the Auclairs.³⁰ He has his faults. He is fastidious, even showy. In his early days he attempted to "make as great a show as people who were much better off"--to equal them in hospitality, in dress, gardens, horses and carriages" (67-8). Even at eighty, he wears "white linen, and satin waistcoats with jewelled buttons. He took great care of his person when he was at home" (57). Yet he is a benevolent figure as well, a heroic man who accomplished his task in Quebec, restoring the fur trade and protecting the French colonists from Iroquois raids: "He had chastised the Indians, restored peace and order, secured the safety of trade" (238). And at his death Auclair mourns his loss: "he was always courteous and considerate. He belonged to the old order; he cherished those beneath him and rendered his duty to those above him, but flattered nobody, not the King himself" (261). His heart is returned to France, to the land from which he has been exiled. But his spirit lives on in Quebec. And his replacement by Pierre suggests an amalgamation of the Old World culture and New World daring and pride in the face of nature. For to Cather, at least, they share certain values in common, "the qualities which he [Auclair] did not have himself but which he admired most in other men" (266).

The traditions of France have been transferred to Quebec by the little group of French exiles who have come to make a new home in a New World. These traditions are central to the French way of life. As Cather explains:

Inferretque deos Latio. When an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country, the colony he founds will, from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit. Its history will shine with bright incidents, slight, perhaps, but precious, as in life itself, where the great matters are often as worthless as astronomical distances, and the trifles dear as the heart's blood. (98)

And they are transferred unchanged from the Old to the New.

In the past, Cather has emphasized the importance of routine, in Mrs. Bergson of O Pioneers! and Grandmother Burden of My Ántonia, but she also indicates the defects of a too rigid observance and of schedules without meaning: "[Oscar's] love of routine amounted to a vice. He worked like an insect, always doing the same thing over in the same way, regardless of whether it was best or no".³¹ Now routine has become essential to order itself, and any variation or change will destroy not only personal happiness but the success of the whole little civilization in the New World. As Cécile's mother explains to her:

In time you will come to love your duties as I do. You will see that your father's whole happiness depends on order and regularity, and you will come to feel a pride in it. Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages. At home, in France, we have learned to do all these things in the best way, . . . and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe and other nations envy us. (24-5)

She entrusts to her "the sacred fire" of culture:

something so precious, so intangible; a feeling about life that had come down to her through so many centuries and that she had brought with her across the wastes of obliterating, brutal ocean. The sense of "our way",--that was what she wanted to leave with her daughter. She wanted to believe that when she herself was

lying in this rude Canadian earth, life would go on almost unchanged in this room with its dear (and to her, beautiful,) objects; that the proprieties would be observed, all the little shades of feeling which make the common fine. (25)

The little salon, symbol of this culture, is itself almost unchanged. Its familiar and well-loved furniture, its objets d'art, its silver candlesticks and decanters of wine, reproduce almost exactly the salon in Paris, and its cheering fire and the song of Cécile provides a centre of warmth for the community, the domestic hearth to counter the rude natural setting on the barren rock of Quebec.³² Here Blinker comes for his evening gruel, Jacques for his chocolate, Father Herbert and Pierre for dinner. Food is exalted to the place of ritual, a symbol of culture and French tradition, and much of the detail of the novel deals with marketing in winter for wood-doves, lard and supplies of carrots, pumpkins, potatoes, garlic and salad things, in summer for wild strawberries and gooseberries (47, 13). The sprig of parsley which Cécile preserves even on the coldest nights symbolizes her direct inheritance from her mother of "our way" (25). All these preparations for the comforts of life which seem incidental to the life of the Archbishop (but which are nevertheless stressed by Cather) are now part of the necessary order of life and the preservation of the "sacred fire" of culture. The second winter is hardest for Cécile precisely because the order of preparation has not been observed, in anticipation of their return to France with the autumn ships: "A life without security, without plans, without preparation for the future, had been terrible. Nothing had gone right this fall" (252).

Cécile's initiation into the rites of this mystique of domestic culture is marked by her visit to the Harnois, from which she returns

changed to the unchanged order of home. With the Harnois she rejects the life in nature of the corrupted man, as opposed to the pure life of those such as Pierre in contact with the cleanliness and order of the woods. She is now prepared to take up her mission which her mother has bequeathed to her--the conservation of "the sacred fire":

[Cécile] was accustomed to think that she did all these things so carefully to please her father, and to carry out her mother's wishes. Not she realized that she did them for herself quite as much. . . . These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them, one made, not shoes or cabinet-work but life itself. (197-8)

The other centre of art in the little colony is the Catholic Church, but the few references in the novel are scattered through and connected tenuously to the daily life of Cécile. The place of religious ritual and aesthetic beauty in the Church of the New World is emphasized by both Bishop Laval and Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier:

The services of the Church should be performed in Quebec as elaborately, splendidly, as anywhere else in the world. For many years Bishop Laval had kept himself miserably poor to make the altar and the sacristy rich. (113)

On Christmas Eve, the priests from the seminary and the clergy sing the Mass, and the Monseigneur wears his aube of rich lace given to him for his consecration in Paris. The Lady-Chapel is decorated in green or red velvet curtains, depending on ^{the} season, and the children go to look at the delicate gold-work of the Ursuline Chapel or the paintings of Notre Dame de la Victoire, especially the one which Cécile believes to portray Heaven drawn by someone who had been there.

The art of the novel stresses the Holy Family and the child-like simplicity of the faith. Jesus appears in a woodcut in an old book as the playfellow of little Saint Edmond, "all surrounded by rays,

. . . treading on the earth, not floating in the air" (85). The central tower of Notre Dame de la Victoire is crowned with the statue of the Blessed Mother and Child, the mother "a charming figure of young motherhood,--oh, very young and radiantly happy" and the child:

So intelligent and gay, a child in a bright and joyful mood, both arms stretched in a gesture of welcome, as if he were giving a fête for his little friends. . . . He was a little Lord indeed, in his gaiety and graciousness and savoir-faire. (65-6)

Saint Anne, who carries in her arms a little dark-skinned virgin, is not young, but "worn by life, and sad. She seemed to know beforehand all the sorrows of her own family, and of the world" (65). The children light the candles at her feet for primarily aesthetic reasons: "it was pleasanter, they agreed, when there was enough candles burning before Saint Anne to show the gold flowers of her cloak" (66). In the Lady Chapel are two painting of Sainte Geneviève, both in a field surrounded by her sheep, and in the one watched by two angels. These decorations accord with the theme of the Church which has been called "the Church of the Infant Jesus" until five years ago when Our Lady had protected Quebec from invasion (64).

Other references to the art of the Church are rare. Sister Anne arranges miracle-plays at Christmas for the pensionnaires, not to enlarge their knowledge of the Bible but "for the good of their French and their deportment" (61), and the recluse Jeanne Le Ber embroiders vestments and altarcloths for the mission (134). In contrast to Death Comes for the Archbishop, the emphasis on religious art is slight, yet in association with the miracles and legends, the tales of martyrs and of the common people of Quebec, the aesthetic

texture of the novel is not weak.

Yet Shadows on the Rock no longer concerns the quest of the artist for meaning in life; the search is satisfied for the characters in the novel, by the domestic and religious life of Quebec. They no longer seek to make, to create, but only to preserve without change the order and ritual of the past. In her late novels, Cather has abandoned the major preoccupation of her art, the search for values in the external world to satisfy her ideals, and has accepted instead, at least temporarily, the status quo, although it is now the status quo of the past.

Man and Religion: "their rock was an idea of God. . . permanent, enduring, without shadow of change,"³³

Shadows on the Rock is the most explicitly religious of all Willa Cather's novels, more so than Death Comes for the Archbishop, for the tales and legends of saints and martyrs, the religious order and ceremony, the treatment of religion, are part of the texture of the work, and although much of their emphasis is natural or cultural, there is a religious tone which is missing elsewhere, something enduring and changeless although it also suggests something of-this-world. There are two weaknesses in this religious affirmation. One frequent objection is that it is child-like; as the domestic life suggests to Randall playing dolls-house, the religious life is on the level of Sunday-school, and the tales are usually narrated to six-year-old Jacques by twelve-year-old Cécile, so that they lack complexity and maturity. The sense of sin and evil and missing; none are judged in the end, and while this is part of

the intent in the love versus the law theme, it also weakens the sense of reality and leads to a slightly saccharine picture of existence. A more central weakness is the real inability of Cather to believe her own religious affirmation.

The nuns affirm the existence of order and its importance as a principle of the universe, in the New World equally with the Old:

[Here] in this safe, lovingly arranged and ordered universe (not too vast, though nobly spacious,) in this congenial universe, the drama of man went on at Quebec just as at home, and the Sisters played their part in it. There was sin, of course, and there was punishment after death; but there was always hope. . . . (97)

But the belief of the Count on his deathbed is perhaps nearer to the real religion of Willa Cather, a religion which looks for a source of stability to the Rock of Ácoma to guide this life by, and a source of comfort for any life after death:

He would die here, in this room, and his spirit would go before God to be judged. He believed this, because he had been taught it in childhood, and because he knew there was something in himself and in other men that this world did not explain. Even the Indians had to make a story to account for something in their lives that did not come out of their appetites: conceptions of courage, duty, honour. The Indians had these, in their own fashion. These ideas came from some unknown source, and they were not the least part of life. (247)

Like the Rock of Ácoma, the little colony of Quebec on its rock in the Saint Lawrence becomes a symbol of life lived in perfect accord with nature and with art, so that it is personified as religion incarnate: "[in winter] Quebec seemed shrunk to a mere group of shivering spires; the whole rock looked like one great white church, above the frozen river" (136). In its merging of natural land formation with the architecture of civilization and the spires of religion, Quebec becomes the perfect symbol for Cather of order and of the ultimate unity

of nature, art and religion:

Auclair thought this rock-set town like nothing so much as one of those little artificial mountains which were made in the churches at home to present a theatric scene of the Nativity; cardboard mountains, broken up into cliffs and ledges and hollows to accommodate groups of figures on their way to the manger. . . .

Divest your mind of Oriental colour, and you saw here very much such a mountain rock, cunningly built over with churches, convents fortifications, gardens, following the natural irregularities of the headland on which they stood; . . . The Château Saint-Louis. . . the convent and church of the Récollet friars. . . the Convent of the Ursulines. . . lower still stood the massive foundation of the Jesuits, facing the Cathedral. Immediately behind the Cathedral, the cliff ran up sheer again, shot out into a jutting spur, and there, high in the blue air, between heaven and earth, rose old Bishop Laval's Seminary. Beneath it the rock fell away in a succession of terraces like a circular staircase
 ...[A]nd two hundred feet below them all was the Lower Town, crowded along the narrow strip of beach between the river's edge and the perpendicular face of the cliff. . . .

On the opposite shore of the river, just across from the proud rock of Quebec, the black pine forest came down to the water's edge; and on the west, behind the town, the forest stretched no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an uncharted continent. . . . (4-6)

The rock of Quebec then becomes a temporal representation of the spiritual world, set in the alien world of nature.³⁴ It is a refuge for those tired from the pursuits of society or the lashing of the elements; cold, night, winter. Notre Dame de la Victoire, a plain little church of rough stone, suggests a fortress with its high narrow windows, and Auclair slips into its quiet after his trip to the market place, shutting out the bright lights, the sunlight, and the noise of the Place in its dusk and quiet (49). To Cécile and Jacques, "in there one was out of the wind, and perhaps the bright colours made one feel the cold less" (62). The monastery of the Jesuits provides a shelter from the wind where, behind seven-foot walls, the wall-grapes grow in large purple clusters, shielded from the elements, and the

Cathedral steps shelter Jacques and Cécile who sit there in the orange winter sunset to eat their goûter.(99) The terms which are used to describe the Church buildings are almost always in terms of shelter or protection and suggest a wall, a fortress, part of the natural rock itself. Even Heaven is described in these terms; Cécile takes Jacques to look at the paintings in Lady Chapel which she believes to be a reproduction of Heaven itself, drawn in France by those who had been there:

It was a reproduction of a feudal castle, all stone walls and towers. The outer wall was low and thick, with many battlements; the second was higher, with fewer battlements; the third seemed to be the wall of the palace itself, with towers and many windows. . . . It was very comforting to them both to know just what Heaven looked like,--strong and unassailable, wherever it was set among the stars.(65)

The order of the Catholic ritual too is a protection against the elements; it transcends the order of nature and fulfills it. For the Nuns of the Ursuline Sisters, the order of the natural universe is present as a divine emanation from God, here as in France:

They had the same well-ordered universe about them; this all-important earth, created by God for a great purpose, the sun which He made to light it by day, the moon which he made to light it by night,--and the stars, made to beautify the vault of heaven like frescoes, and to be a clock and compass for man. (97)

Here they are not exiles; when the people mourn the return of the ships to France, and fear for those they love in the midst of death or dangers which they cannot share, the Sisters are at home:

When they came across the Atlantic, they brought their family with them, their kindred, their closest friends. . . the Holy Family, the saints and martyrs, the glorious company of the Apostles, the heavenly host. (96-7)

For the people of New France, the order of the Church provides security and hope, and they are strengthened in their daily fight against nature

by old Bishop Laval who rises early to ring the bell for prayers:

[Cécile] felt a peculiar sense of security, as if there must be powerful protection for Kebec in such steadfastness, and the new day, which was yet darkness, was beginning as it should. The punctual bell and the stern old Bishop who rang it began an orderly procession of activities and held life together on the rock, though the winds lashed it and the billows of snow drove over it. (105)³⁵

This religious order is marked through the novel by the ritual of the Church year; All Souls Day, All Saints Day, Christmas, mark the life of Quebec and are observed accordingly.³⁶ The pattern of Church life is stronger here and more basic to the structure of the book than, surprisingly, in Death Comes for the Archbishop, although we see the events simplified and less complex through the eyes of the children Cécile and Jacques. Part of the Church universal, this ritual and order which has appealed so much to Cather's Protestantism, is as rich and devout in Quebec as elsewhere, for the Bishop and Saint-Vallier agree on this one point: "the services of the Church should be performed in Quebec as elaborately, as splendidly, as anywhere else in the world" (113).

The inset tales, legends and miracles are part of the total religious meaning of Shadows on the Rock and, as in Death Comes for the Archbishop, they function to expand the religious breadth and to provide a variety of religious experience not available to the central characters. Indeed the religious affirmation of the novel lies in these inset tales and legends rather than in the novel proper. These tales are related to the New World of France through Cécile's childish imagination:

The martyrdoms of the early Church which she read about in her

Lives of the Saints never seemed to her half so wonderful or so terrible as the martyrdoms of Father Brébeuf, Father Lalemant, Father Jogues, and their intrepid companions. To be thrown into the Rhone or the Moselle, to be decapitated at Lyon,--what was that to the tortures the Jesuit missionaries endured at the hands of the Iroquois, in those savage, interminable forests? And could the devotion of Sainte Geneviève or Sainte Philomène be compared to that of Mother Catherine de Saint-Augustin or Mother Marie de l'Incarnation? (101-2)

The miracles of the novel are varied and appear in a number of contexts: the appearance of the child Jesus to the little Saint Edmond in the wood-cut (85), and of Father Brébeuf to Mother Catherine (42), the rescue of the child of Saint-Malo by the Blessed Virgin, when the she-ape carried it along the roofs of the houses to leave it in an alcove by the image of the Virgin (223-4), the tale of the sailor converted through a fragment of Brébeuf's skull which had been mixed into gruel (125). In the narrative itself, there is the preservation of the life of Pierre Charron from an explosion of powder, from the rapids and from a gunshot, through the intercession of Jeanne Le Ber who has promised him:

I will always pray for you. . . . As long as we are both in this world, you may know that I pray for you every day; that God may preserve you from sudden death without repentance and that we may meet in heaven. (179)

In a statement typically cautious and non-mythic, Cather explains carefully the role which she feels that miracles play in religious life:

The people have loved miracles for so many hundred years, not as proof or evidence, but because they are the actual flowering of desire. In them the vague worship and devotion of the simple-hearted assumes a form. From being a shapeless longing, it becomes a beautiful image; a dumb rapture becomes a melody that can be remembered and repeated; and the experience of a moment, which might have been a lost ecstasy, is made an actual possession and can be bequeathed to another. (137)³⁷

Nevertheless, her affirmation is countered by the scepticism of her central characters: both Pierre and Auclair question the validity of miracles (and even the validity of sacrifice). While Pierre's comment that the Church makes beavers into fish every Friday is facetious, it does imply a criticism of the Church which Cécile notes and rejects (224). Auclair's criticism is more searching, for he asserts that a fragment of Brébeuf's skull would kill rather than convert the sailor and he would not permit a patient to swallow a fragment of the bone of Saint Peter himself:

The sacred relics are all very well, my dear, and I do not deny that they work miracles,--but not through the digestive tract. . . . The relics of the saints may work cures at the touch, they may be a protection worn about the neck; those things are outside my knowledge. (126)

This statement denies the statement of the church itself in a day when its pronouncements were quite infallible to any true believer. It is quite possible that Cather took the incident directly from the diary of her seventeenth century apothecary;³⁸ nevertheless, Auclair's rather cautious acceptance of miracles is clearly in accord with Cather's own beliefs as suggested elsewhere in her work.

The tales too are an important part of the religious statement of the novel, and each of them affirms the place of sacrifice in religion, although it also queries the validity of this sacrifice. Thus we have the suffering of Father Hector in the wilderness, the physical deprivations, hunger and dirt, as well as the solitude and loneliness and isolation. And Noel Chabanel becomes a martyr in life as in death, in accepting a life which disgusted him at the cost of peace, beauty, order and culture, even at the cost of prayer and a sense of the pre-

sence of God himself. This sacrifice to the full, Father Hector gives when he renounces France, his friends and family, nieces and nephews, for God: "Nothing worth while is accomplished except by that last sacrifice, the giving of oneself altogether and finally" (149).³⁹

The life of Bishop Laval, too, has been a sacrifice of comfort and culture in devotion to the Church. He has given away all his riches, his linen, silver and velvets, to needy parishioners, all the revenues of his French abbeys, and the title of his Canadian land grants to the Seminary in Quebec (73), and has devoted himself to poverty and penance. He has sometimes forgotten the people in need, in his political and ecclesiastical struggles to establish the Church as the centre of life in Quebec, but his devotion to order and to the Church draws men from their slumbers to worship and keeps them in contact with the Church: "He was a stubborn, high-handed, tyrannical old man, but no one could deny that he shepherded his sheep" (74).⁴⁰

And Mother Catherine de Saint Augustine, who has begun her religious life at eleven and a half, and vowed at fourteen to go to Canada to "save the soul of the savages", dies at forty for: "At thirty-seven she had burned her life out in vigils, mortifications, visions, raptures, all the while carrying on a steady routine of manual labour and administrative work, observing the full discipline of her order" (42).

But the life of Jeanne Le Ber is the fullest treatment of "the giving of oneself altogether" (149). In previous years, Willa Cather has asserted that this last sacrifice is due to art; Thea refused to come home from Germany where she was to sing a star role, in order to

see her mother on her deathbed. Now it is religion which demands everything. Jeanne Le Ber refuses too to attend her mother in death, even though she is in the same house, and answers her mother's wish for a kiss of farewell; "tell her I am praying for her night and day" (133). Jeanne Le Ber rejects her suitor Pierre, her riches, and the elite society which her merchant father has planned for her, and retires to a life of prayer and seclusion, at first to her own chamber where she speaks to no one but her personal maid, and after ten years, to the convent which has been built from her dowry money. She has reduced her life to "unvarying routine" of prayer, worship, confession, simple food and sleep on a narrow bed, and during the daylight, embroidery of vestments and altarcloths for the missions or knitting stockings for the poor. She rejects physical comfort, suffering, cold in the winter and heat in the summer. Even her family she forbids to visit her, and her mother can see her only in Church, near the altar in her gray serge, or stealing through the hall in the early morning on her way to mass. But although the tale of Jeanne Le Ber is the greatest affirmation of religion over life, even here Cather casts doubt over the validity of her experience. Her retreat is an escape from life; she rejects the supplication of her confessor to walk in the cloister gardens for air:

Ah, mon père, ma chambre est mon paradis terrestre; c'est mon centre; c'est mon élément. Il n'y a pas de lieu plus délicieux, ni plus salubre pour moi; point de Louvre, point de palais, qui me soit plus agréable. Je préfère ma cellule à tout le reste de l'univers. (136)

While the appearance of the angels to mend her spinning-wheel presumably is a mark of the Divine favour, the tone of the tale is not one of joy

but of tragedy and waste. Her suffering appears to be greater than her achievement, even though she becomes a symbol of faith to the country-people. And the judgment of Pierre Charron, though it is personal, nevertheless questions the religious life demanded by the Church:

If the venerable Bourgeoys had not got hold of that girl in her childhood and overstrained her with fasts and penances, she would be a happy mother today, not sleeping in a stone cell like a prisoner. There are plenty of girls, ugly, poor, stupid, awkward, who are made for such a life. (177-8)

While Auclair weakly replies "Still, if it is the life she desires, and if her father can bear it" (178), it is the bitterness of Pierre which prevails. His statement, in effect, denies that beauty and intellect, culture and learning have their place in the service of the Church. That it is not unique to Pierre is indicated in Auclair's response to the sacrifices of Noel Chabanel and of Father Hector:

[he wondered] whether there had not been a good deal of misplaced heroism in the Canadian missions,--a waste of rare qualities which did nobody any good. "Ah well," he sighed at last, perhaps that is the box of precious ointment which was acceptable to the Saviour. (154-5)

Pierre's doubts are borne out in the subsequent tale of Jeanne's life. Her mother has suffered, her father suffers, Pierre suffers, and even Jeanne Le Ber herself has suffered: "her voice is "like an old crow's" (180), "hoarse, hollow, with the sound of despair in it" (183) and her face is like stone "it had been through every sorrow" (182). In rejecting the material elements of life, she has lost joy but not sorrow and suffering. She destroys Pierre too: "I felt that I would never be the same man again. I only wanted to die and forget that I had ever hoped for anything in this world" (183).

Pierre hides in the Church at night to see her, and she calls out to the anonymous sinner whom she hears: "God have mercy upon you! I will pray for you. And do you pray for me also" (183).

In the last analysis, then, the price of the sacrifice is too high. While Auclair's decision that this waste is the box of precious ointment allows him to go to sleep, it also neatly evades for Willa Cather a question which is basic to her theory of religion. One feels that she never faces it squarely in the Archbishop; she is not really prepared to sacrifice culture and art for religion, at least for her central characters, and the result is that her Archbishop sacrifices nothing, despite frequent statements of his deprivations, not even in salads, but truly "has all these things added unto him".³⁵

But there is a message of love in Shadows on the Rock which is stronger than in any previous novel, and which suggests the theme of love in the late short stories "Neighbour Rosicky" and "Old Mrs. Harris", although these are not religious in context. For although the sacrifice of Noel Chabanel and Father Herbert is questioned, and the resolution shaky ~~logically~~, although the whole tale of Jeanne Le Ber suggests the Protestant view of the contemplative way rather than the Catholic in its effectual rejection of the convent life for normal motherhood, there are still the religious stories of Jacques and the Bishop, and the secular stories of Bichet and Blinker which state that love is more important than the law, and that giving which is the greatest sacrifice is also the greatest love.⁴² Little Jacques' gift of the little wooden beaver, his only possession and carved by a kind sailor, to the little Christ-child in Cécile's creche

illustrates this concept of love and mercy in two ways. It is love which arises on a personal level out of sacrifice, and it also reflects Divine Love and Mercy which can bring salvation and joy out of man's sin and evil: "we have a bad woman amongst us, and one of her clients makes a toy for her son, and he gives it to the Holy Child for a birthday present. That is very nice" (112).⁴³

There is too the love of Bishop Laval for his people, his devotion which orders their lives and makes possible their continuing struggle of life in the wilderness. Waking up in the early morning, he rings the bell for early prayers:

Many good people who did not want to go to mass at all, when they heard that hoarse, frosty bell clanging out under the black sky where there was not yet even a hint of daybreak, groaned and went to Church. . . . His will was stronger than theirs. (74)

Cather illustrates the Bishop's love for his people in the story of the child Jaques, whom he finds shivering in the icy January night on the steps of the Bishop's new place. He heats for him the chocolate left for his own breakfast, washes him and wraps him in a towel, rubbing his feet carefully before the fire as Christ washes the feet of the disciples (73), begs clothes for him of his parishioners, and finally returns him to his mother with an injunction that he will be given to the Sisters of the Congregation if he is neglected (76-7). For the child, male, half-clad and on the steps of the rival's wealthy residence, suggests to him the infant Jesus, come to remind him that he has neglected his personal duties and commitments for political and economic affairs, and he serves his people as he would serve the Christ child himself "He shall feed His lambs. . .".

The inset tales of Bichet and Blinker clearly demonstrate the importance of the theme of love over the law. Old Bichet, a knife-grinder who lodged in the Auclair cellar, was caught for stealing two old brass kettles from an empty coach-house, and turned in to the police by a cruel half-wit. Under torture, he confessed to a life of crime, and when Auclair wished to swear that he had stolen nothing from himself or Count Frontenac, it became clear that he would be tortured further to correct his confession. Bichet was hanged the next morning. Cecile interprets this story as evidence of Evil in the Old World; the New World is free of this evil and prefers love to the law: "I had rather stay in Quebec always! Nobody is tortured here, except by the Indians, in the woods, and they know no better" (93). When she asks why a kind King would allow this, Auclair replies:

It is not the King, my dear, it is the Law. The Law is to protect property, and it thinks too much of property. A couple of brass pots, an old saddle, are reckoned worth more than a poor man's life. Christ would have forgiven Bichet, as he did the thief on the cross. We must think of him in paradise, where no law can touch him. (93)

While Bichet represents man's suffering on earth for little apparent cause, the story of Blinker illustrates the Christian theme of forgiveness and Divine Mercy, for Blinker represents the sinning Adam and the tainted nature of man. The son of the torturer in the King's prisons of Rouen, he was brought up to the trade and hated by all the people. But one day, a boy returned to Rouen for whose murder his mother had been tortured and hung. In doubt as to whether his victims had not all been innocent, Blinker came to Quebec to escape his past but is haunted by it, as Man by his guilt: "these things

would rise up out of the past. . . faces. . . voices. . . even words, things they had said. They are inside me, monsieur, I carry them with me" (161). He has chosen to come to Auclair for "you said the law was wrong, not us poor creatures" (162), and Auclair brings him comfort and healing in the words of Queen Dido to Aeneas: "Suffering teaches^{us} compassion," and . "Having known misery, I have learned to pity the miserable" (162-3).

In these tales, the message of Shadows on the Rock seems to offer to man love and Divine Mercy. Suffering and sacrifice are necessary whether they occur through the conquest of nature in the wilderness, through life in society, or through the subjection of the self in abnegation and prayer. Although the conflict is played down and the novel appears on the surface too simple, too naive, it does have a deeper message in the promise of the Church to redeem man's sins, to provide order and beauty in life, and courage and endurance in the face of suffering and death. Although there is scepticism, the novel represents Cather's ultimate religious affirmation, not only in literature but in her life. In "Old Mrs. Harris" she will treat again the nature of love and sacrifice, but she will never again present her ideas in a religious framework.

CONCLUSION

Some people's lives are affected by what happens to their persons or their property; but for others, fate is what happens to their feelings and their thoughts--that and nothing more.

So wrote Willa Cather in longhand on the frontispiece of an autographed edition of Lucy Gayheart, and this statement gives us an insight into the development of Cather's world, both her own personal world and her world of art. For increasingly, the events which are important are not external but internal, until in Shadows on the Rock there is no physical plot or action in any real sense, and the development relates only to Cécile's recognition of her role as preserver of a traditional Old World culture and ritual in the New World of Quebec. In Cather's own life, this development of mind and thought is tragic. In 1921 she remarked of criticism of her earliest work The Troll Garden; "Nearly all very young authors write sad stories in revolt against everything. Humor, kindliness, tolerance come late".² Yet Cather herself never really achieves this balance, this tolerance and understanding. Already at thirty Lewis tells us she possessed a "strain of melancholy" and a "sense that human destiny was ultimately, and necessarily tragic"; she recognized the inevitable struggle of human life and "the hardness of human fate".³ In a sense, her period of highest optimism occurs between 1913 and 1918, where her three heroines, Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronberg and Antonia Shimerda all triumph over their environment. After this her novels become successively more pessimistic until with The Professor's House, she dismisses

modern America and returns to an earlier and happier past, approaching the present only in the sentimental Lucy Gayheart and in the nostalgia of Obscure Destinies or the petulance of The Old Beauty. For as Takano remarks, her sense of tragedy is basic to her view of human existence, and is a recognition of "the inevitable gap between her values, and the values, or valuelessness, of the contemporary world".⁴

In an article on Hemingway's exploration of escape, Robert Stephens points out that there are three responses to an intolerable situation: escape, resignation, or struggle to change the predicament. While escape can take the form of physical flight or emotional withdrawal, the escapist follows a set pattern of rejection, avoidance, and a quest for new values.⁵ Certainly Cather, faced with the predicament of the modern world, is neither resigned, nor determined to change the present. Rather, her middle novels reject the values of twentieth century America, its culture and ideals, and she evades these problems by turning to the past and by searching for a new order to replace art. Marcus Klein, while admitting this, suggests that Cather is not an escapist, that the tone of her writing was neither nostalgic nor ironic:

The past was, simply, where she located greatness, and greatness was her constant subject, and not degeneration. . . . Those three Nebraska novels record, in a way, her loss of a subject. The frontier had in fact yielded to the obtrusive present. . . . And so she was put to the critical labor of finding a purer past, one that would stay past and not decay into the present, one that could propose images that would last forever.⁶

Certainly Cather's art has been a quest for values which are eternal, stable and unchanging. Her goal is similar to that of her early heroes and heroines, as noted by Klein:

They are in pursuit not of happiness but success. They are in pursuit not of an ideal--ideals contain ideas, and Willa Cather

is not an ideologue--but of an integrity, the feel of purity and finality and permanence, beyond all pettiness.⁷

The early novels find this stability and permanence in the order of nature and in a closeness to the land; Thea finds it in art and a dedication to a career which demands of her "that last sacrifice, the giving of oneself altogether and finally".⁸ Alexandra, Ántonia, Thea: all achieve success; but what then? In One of Ours, Cather comes to consider the end of the idealist who is prevented by fate from achieving greatness, and whose sacrifice to a purposeless war is ironic. In The Professor's House she faces an even more difficult problem, for ultimately success does not bring meaning and an end to striving, but only the necessity for a new search. The Catholic church provides a temporary answer, but it is an answer which suffices for the past only; it does not have the strength to combat the powers of evil in the modern world and overcome them.

Cather has always asserted the importance of life in relationship to art. The great artist recreates for us "those things which we see everyday, which only a master can force us to regard seriously",⁹ and his purpose is not to teach a moral but to "refresh and recharge the spirit of those who can read their language".¹⁰ "Out of the teaming, gleaming stream of the present", the artist selects "the eternal material of art"¹¹; he makes a mould "to imprison for a moment the shining elusive element which is life itself".¹² In her late essay "Escapism", Cather asserts:

The themes of true poetry, of great poetry, will be the same until all the values of human life have changed and all the strongest emotional responses have become different--which can hardly occur until the physical body itself has fundamentally changed.¹³

Yet in turning her back upon the modern world as a source for creativity, Cather effectually denies these universal human emotions and preoccupations as a source for art. Her scope is not broad enough to see the enduring values of the past, changed in outward form but still the basic values of any extant civilization. Love, charity, joy in the passing moment are still present in the modern world as in the world of Cather's adolescence; the struggle between good and evil continues as it did in the days of Shakespeare and Carlyle, Tolstoi and Flaubert. But these central preoccupations of the great artists have never absorbed Cather. Her value lies in recording, within a defined range and scope, the joys of childhood and youth and the gentle nostalgia with which we look back upon the fading but golden memories of the past. Occasionally, as in The Professor's House, she succeeds as well in recording the mood of her era, the depression of middle age, and the recognition of the successful that ~~their~~ rewards are suddenly empty. But for the most part, her castigation of modern America reveals a personal bitterness and a lack of balance not commensurate with the greatest art.

Stephen Tennant in his essay "The Room Beyond" attempts to analyze Cather's success in art:

Art is not life, and it is not a substitute for it. . . . It is a method, the only one, of preserving the beauty of transient things, the wonder of youthful happiness, the pleasures of controversy, wit, and enterprise, and the finer aspects of intellectual discovery, in an enduring and pleasing form. . . . [Cather] could transmute, with no apparent effort, the commonplaces of daily life--people--things--places--to an elixir that was, since it was art, essentially artificial. . . . We know that she is a great writer. . . because of the curious fact that with a few mild sentences and rather uneventful narrative she convinces us that our lives have given, and received, happiness. She reassures us of the importance of little things. The seemingly trivial events and

emotions--these, by some oblique method never apparent on the surface, she makes momentous--vivid, more our own than our often disguised and uncharacteristic lives. That is why her readers adore her; she restores to the ravaged ego its sense of unity . . . of a scheme, a final design in the rich, desolating chaos we call life.¹⁴

Certainly, at her best, Cather conveys to us this sense of life; My Ántonia, The Professor's House, parts of Death Comes for the Archbishop record in art the texture of life, the little events and daily occurrences which combine to make up our human existence. Yet Tennant is inaccurate in his claim that she possesses a "great range of sympathies and ability to like, and divine, Life--even at its most grim and stark,--at its poorest and emptiest".¹⁵ And his remark that "perhaps her greatness is partly the power to comprehend fully and love people, and value them"¹⁶ ignores her real inability to portray fully any character who is not either simple and presented on the surface, or essentially an author-surrogate.

For Cather is essentially a lonely and isolated figure who faces the abyss of the human future not with an ultimate faith in man, which Tennant claims to be "the eternal vision behind her work",¹⁷ but with a tragic awareness that man is incapable of realizing the ideals she has cherished. Her undergraduate essay on Thomas Carlyle written in 1891 perhaps prefigures her later view of her own fate:

He himself would suffer any privation rather than sacrifice an ideal. . . . Like the lone survivor of some extinct species, the last of the mammoths, tortured and harassed beyond all endurance by the smaller, though perhaps perfectly organized offspring of the world's maturer years, this great Titan, son of her passionate youth, a youth of volcanoes and great, unsystematized forces, rushed off into the desert to suffer alone. He died as he lived . . . [and] was buried out on the wild Scotch heath where the cold winds of the North sea sing the chants of Ossian among the Druid pines. He lies there on that wild heath, the only thing in the British Isles with which he seemed to harmonize. He dreamed

always in life, great, wild, maddening dreams: perhaps he sleeps quietly now,--perhaps he wakes.¹⁸

And on Cather's tombstone in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, under the blue sky and the profile of Mount Monadnock, the inscription from My Ántonia reads: "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great".¹⁹

FOOTNOTES: INTRODUCTION

¹ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 2.

² Shakespeare, Sonnet #18.

³ Keats, "Ode to a Grecian Urn."

⁴ Cather, The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 146.

⁵ "The Novel Dèmeublé" in Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 48-9.

⁶ Mark Schorer, The World We Imagine, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968, p. 385.

⁷ Henry James, "The Process of Art" in The Future of the Novel, New York, Vintage Books, 1956, p. 53.

⁸ James, "The Art of Fiction" in The Future of the Novel, p. 20.

⁹ James, "Preface to The Spoils of Poynton" in The Future of the Novel, p. 52. See also Joseph Wood Krutch: "Every great work of literature conveys to the reader a certain sense that a peace of some sort reigns within the domain that it describes. . . . [Its] whole is a whole rather than a collection of fragments and does so balance tumult against tumult as to create an order out of disorder and give to the reader that sense of repose which enables him to recognize it as a work of art distinguished from either any merely literal chronicle of life or life itself." (The Modern Temper, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, Harvest Books, 1956 p. 123.)

¹⁰ James, "The House of Fiction" in The Future of the Novel, pp. 50-51.

¹¹ James, "Preface to The Portrait of a Lady in The Future of the Novel, p. 51.

¹² Collingwood, The Principles of Art, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Books, 1958, p. 273.

¹³ Collingwood, pp. 291-92.

¹⁴ Mumford, Art and Technics, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1960, p. 44.

¹⁵ See Fumi Takano: "To her, art was discipline and order and simplification, and a quest for eternal values" ("Willa Cather, Tsuda Review V, 1960, p. 16).

¹⁶ Alexander's Bridge, N.Y.: Bantam, 1962, pp. vii-viii. Canby quotes her as saying her tradition came from the French; she liked to "analyze what constituted perfection for a given situation or theme. . . . Her idea was that the consummate artist in fiction gave himself entirely to the situation he chose for his story, following its nuances, not shaping it to preconceived effects." ("Willa Cather" in Saturday Review of Literature XXX, May 10, 1947 p. 22).

¹⁷ Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 97.

¹⁸ My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, pp. 371-72.

¹⁹ See Van Doren who claims she is epic less in action than in mood, and in the recreation of the pioneers "primitive and epic in their dispositions" ("Willa Cather" in The American Novel, N.Y.: Macmillan Co. 1940, pp. 114-15.) See also Morton Zabel; "She was one of the last in a long line of commemorators and elegists of American innocence and romantic heroism that virtually dates from the beginnings of a conscious native artistry in American literature. . . . The interesting thing about Miss Cather's career is that it started in protest against and flight from the very world she ended in idealizing and mourning. It recapitulates a characteristic American pattern of rebellion and return, censure and surrender." ("Willa Cather: The Tone of the Time" in Willa Cather and her Critics, James Schroeter ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 217-19.)

²⁰ Sergeant, p. 49.

²¹ "148 Charles Street" in Not Under Forty, pp. 61, 63. She comments of Mrs. Fields, "She had a great power to control and organize . . . a power so sufficient that one seldom felt it as one lived in the harmonious atmosphere it created" and again "Order and calm of the drawing room were . . . such that one might have sat down to write a sonnet or a sonata" at "any hour of the day" (Not Under Forty, pp. 58, 60.)

22 Not Under Forty, p. 71.

23 Not Under Forty, p. 58.

24 My Antonia, pp. 371-72.

25 My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 94.

26 As Kazin points out, these are all ultimately related: "She did not celebrate the pioneer as such; she sought his image in all creative spirits--explorers and artists, lovers and saints, who seemed to live by a purity of aspiration that represented everything that had gone out of life or had to fight a losing battle for survival in it." (On Native Grounds, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956, p. 185.)

27 Sergeant, p. 238.

28 Trilling says of Lucy Gayheart: "It has always been a personal failure of her talent that prevented her from involving her people in truly dramatic relations with each other. . . . But at least once upon a time her people were involved in a dramatic relation with themselves or with their environments. [In this novel] environment does not exist, fate springs from nothing save chance; the characters are unattached to anything save their dreams. The novel has been *demeublé* indeed; but life without its furniture is strangely bare" (After the Genteel Tradition, New York: Viking Press, 1964, p. 56).

29 Geismar asks "Isn't the main trouble with Sapphira and the Slave Girl the fact that nothing really happens in the end?--that a novel which has material for half a dozen tragedies, and which is set against the fury, the intrigue, the rhetoric of probably the most crucial period of our history, should turn out to be so pale and remote? And that the novelist herself, who has constantly reiterated her belief that all that is needed for a drama is four walls and one passion, should manage to achieve, out of all these conflicting personalities and beliefs, only an unlikely 'happy ending'? . . . The conflict in her thinking is most sharply revealed in just that muting and softening, that 'balancing-off', and that final literary stale-mate which marks her attempt to deal with the basic historical issues of Sapphira and the Slave Girl (The Last of the Provincials, New York: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 217.) See also John Randall The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 365.

³⁰ David Daiches, Willa Cather, A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 74. Schorer states "The creative process itself may be described as a movement from the unrealized to the realized. It is in itself the highest form of realization. It is a process that begins in the unconscious, yes; but its impulse, beginning there, is to bring that realm into the realm of consciousness, to objectify the subjective, to know and make known the unknown" (pp. 388-89). The task of the artist is to take the world and experience and "to force it into shape, into order. . . the artist can, and perpetually does create an order that did not exist before he made it" (p. 402).

³¹ Abrams quotes this in The Mirror and the Lamp, N.Y.: Norton and Co. 1958, p. 99. The actual wording is: "[The poem will have] for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. . . . The history of the author's mind" (Poetical Works of William Wordsworth ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949, V, 2).

³² Quoted Schorer, p. 388.

³³ Schorer, p. 388-89, 390-91.

³⁴ The Song of the Lark, p. 351.

³⁵ The Kingdom of Art, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966, p. 390.

³⁶ The Kingdom of Art, p. 149 from Journal October 26, 1895.

³⁷ Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 139.

³⁸ "Letter on 'Death Comes for the Archbishop'" in On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 7.

³⁹ See Forster, Aspects of the Novel, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962, pp. 75-81.

⁴⁰ Interview in Lincoln Sunday Star, Nov. 6, 1921 quoted in Bennett, p. 77.

⁴¹ Sergeant, pp. 271-73.

⁴² Geismar, pp. 155-56. In 1927, in a survey "American Novelists Ranked, A Psychological Study", John Stalnaker and Fred Esson discovered that Cather ranked in first place with Edith Wharton. Of 30 votes, she was ranked first by twenty, second by 7; Group Two consisted of Dreiser, Anderson, Cabell, Lewis, and Group Three, Wilder and Glasgow, while Garland was placed in the fourth category and in the fifth: Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and Upton Sinclair. The critics were men such as Brooks, Canby, Krutch, Pattee, Untermeyer, Mark Van Doren and William Allen White (English Journal XVIII April 1929, pp. 295-307).

⁴³ Geismar, pp. 156-57.

⁴⁴ Geismar, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Kronenberger, "Willa Cather" in Bookman (U.S.) LXXIV, 1931, p. 140. Snell suggests that she is greater than Edith Wharton for although we see surface appearances "we are oftener made to feel the underlying realities . . . the eternal constants of life" (The Shapers of American Fiction, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton, 1947, p. 141). He continues, her best novels have "warmth, gusto, tenderness, a largeness of humanity", "a full sense of felt life". They "illuminate our experience in flashes that are fine and true, as the great novels of all time do" (pp. 151, 153).

⁴⁶ Morris, "Willa Cather" in North American Review CCXIX, 1924, p. 641.

⁴⁷ E. A. and L. D. Bloom: Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, Arcturus Books, 1964, pp. 240-42.

⁴⁸ Canby, pp. 22, 24. He continues "[She is] more creative than critical, preservative, almost antiquarian. She knew evil and suffered from the grossness of materialism and the smugness of cheap success, but preferred to celebrate the vitality of the good" (p. 24).

⁴⁹ Randall, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Randall, p. 374.

⁵¹ Alexander's Bridge, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1962, p. v.

⁵² Quoted in Sergeant, pp. 68-9.

53 Sergeant, p. 69.

54 Sergeant, p. 161.

55 Howard Mumford Jones notes the difference between James and Cather as artists. "[James' narratives] concern the sculptor, the painter, the actress and the writer. But there is a radical difference between the approach of James to this problem and the approach of Willa Cather. For James the problem is one of culture; for Miss Cather, it is a problem of energy. The one pays homage to Apollo, the other to Dionysius, and though both agree that the artist is possessed of a secret and superior truth, for James the problem is Platonic, whereas Miss Cather narrates the unfolding of her singer in terms of Orphic initiation. Culture, it is James' hope, will eventually lead into that study of perfection which is art; but in Miss Cather's world the initiates already recognize each other by signs too subtle for the multitude. Art for the one is wisdom; for the other it is radiance" (from The Bright Medusa in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 248). But see the Blooms, pp. 242-4.

56 Quinn, American Fiction, N.Y.: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1936, pp. 696-7. See note 48 above.

57 Howard Mumford Jones, "The Novels of Willa Cather", Saturday Review of Literature XVIII, Aug. 1938, p. 3. See The Song of the Lark, vi. She said after her hospitalization with a scalp infection "there was no place in her philosophy for the unlucky" (Sergeant, p. 121).

58 Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1922, p. 118. He continues that she combines the merits of Whitman and Sarah Orne Jewett, looking to the "passionate centre of her characters" (p. 119).

59 Wagenknecht, "Willa Cather", Sewanee Review XXXVII, 1929, p. 239. He has commented that her hunger for beauty preserved her from provincialism and her love for common things prevented artistic detachment; "As passionately as any of the moderns she believes in the fulfillment of the individual life" (p. 224). Her rebellion is without bitterness for unlike many she has retained her faith in humanity (pp. 227-8). Whipple also claims that her novels reveal perfect balance, sanity and wholeness, a sense of personal completeness so that her works are "richer and more varied than any other living American novelist" (Spokesmen, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963, p. 157-8). They reveal "that poise, that

undisciplined tact, that clear integrity of thought and feeling" which have become typical of her. He admits weaknesses: "her not infrequent sentiment and rare sentimentality, her original difficulty in focussing her subject, her early inclination to irrelevancies, her initial preoccupation with local colour, avoidance of big scenes, dramatic crises, and stirring action, and infrequent communication of emotion, and then by implication"--But he commends her "sense of fact, her clearness of eyesight and honesty of mind" and suggests in the essay written in 1923 that "One no sooner detects her limitations than she triumphantly outgrows them" (pp. 150-1).

⁶⁰ René Rapin, Willa Cather, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, p. 98. Cather is classical for her "innate romanticism checked by realism" and "both are subservient to a love of life and a respect for the truth." Her style is classic and she is concerned with problems of general interest; her level mirror reflects life (p. 98). Her novels present "a denunciation of what emasculates or enslaves", a vindication of passion, a strong sense of reality, a love of beauty, a valuation of intelligence, moral energy and physical vigour, an appreciation of simple human effort and of culture and the beauty of landscape humanized by suffering and art; all these she combines into a harmonious whole" (p. 98).

⁶¹ Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather", American Literature X, 1938-9, pp. 130-1.

⁶² Footman, p. 139. Van Doren also considers her central theme to be "the struggle of some elect individual to outgrow the restrictions laid upon him--or more frequently her--by numbing circumstances" (The American Novel, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1940, p. 115). Her pioneers and artists are similar in that they are "equal in single-mindedness . . . they work much by themselves, contending with definite though ruthless obstacles and looking forward, if they win, to a freedom which cannot be achieved in the routine of crowded communities" (p. 116). See also Lloyd Morris, p. 644 for a similar statement of theme.

⁶³ Brynner, "A Willa Cather Triptych", New Mexico Quarterly XXIII, 1953, pp. 337-8.

⁶⁴ William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction, in Jones, Leisy, Ludwig, ed. Major American Writers, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1952, Chap. XV, p. 1267, Chap. XXIII, p. 1276.

⁶⁵ Howells, Chapter II, p. 1265.

- 66 Howells, Chapter II, p. 1267.
- 67 "Miss Jewett" in Not Under Forty, p. 82.
- 68 Foerster in The Reinterpretation of American Literature, N.Y.: Russell and Russell, 1959, p. 35.
- 69 Howells, Chapter XXI, p. 1270.
- 70 "The Novel D  meubl  " in Not Under Forty, p. 45.
- 71 Sergeant tells us that her creative force was similar to an iceberg, nine-tenths of it submerged in her subconscious (p. 108) and Van Ghent suggests that the weakness of One of Ours is the result of "a temperament that would never wholly know itself; they are the negative aspect of an endowment that remained in large degree unconscious" (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1964, p. 26).
- 72 Sergeant, p. 167.
- 73 Parrington in Reinterpretations of American Literature, ed. Foerster, p. 63.
- 74 Quoted Hoffman, The Modern Novel in America, p. 1.
- 75 Not Under Forty, pp. 45-6. Morton Zabel suggests that in these comments Cather reveals herself as an "aesthetic fundamentalist". Although opposite to Zola, she like him denies art "its right to richness of thought and complexity. What such principles limit is not merely craftsmanship; it is subject-matter itself. Miss Cather saw as little as Zola did that to inhibit craftsmanship or content is to inhibit or starve the sensibility and insight that nourish them, and to arrive at the sterility of high-mindedness and the infirmity of an ideal." ("Willa Cather: The Tone of the Time", Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 222-3). Footman points out that her definition of realism was false; that these novelists are not interested in mechanical processes and physical sensations as she suggests (p.127).
- 76 Not Under Forty, pp. 46-7.
- 77 Not Under Forty, pp. 47-8.

78 Not Under Forty, p. 48.

79 My Ántonia, p. 328. Pinned to Miss Jewett's desk was a sentence of Flaubert's: "Ce n'est pas de faire rire ni de faire pleurer, ni de vous mettre á fûreur, mais d'agir a la façon de la nature, c'est á dire de faire rêver", and Brown notes that it would be a suitable epigraph for Cather's works, in particular, Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock (quoted Brown, Willa Cather, A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. 139-40).

80 See Willa Cather in Europe, N.Y.: Knopf, 1956, pp. 132-3 quoted on page 58.

81 But see Cooperman's interpretation in "Willa Cather and the Bright Face of Death", Literature and Psychology XIII, Summer 1963, pp. 81-7 discussed One of Ours, note 22 page

82 Granville Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather", English Journal XXII (Nov. 1933, p. 706. Grant Knight has called these novels "Genuine realism, a sticking close to the dirt and grass of farmlands, a sympathy with the woman who toils, a non-roseate description of the Middle West in its sod-house state, yet relieved of sordidness by the quality of its healthy idealism, by its taste, which refrains from the dead-cat naturalism of Zola and the preying naturalism of George Moore" (Knight, "Willa Cather" in American Literature and Culture, N.Y.: Ray Long and Richard Smith, 1932, pp. 421-5).

83 Hicks, p. 709.

84 R. W. Horton and H. W. Edwards, The Backgrounds of American Literary Thought, N.Y.: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1952, p. 187.

85 Sergeant, p. 164. See also her reaction to her own illness, a scalp infection caused by a hat pin. Sergeant notes: "Her comments on her illness sounded the note of 'The Profile'. A physical blemish is so abnormal it creates a mental deformity. Willa went so far as to say she deserved derision, such as was given to lunatics in Dickens' time." (Sergeant, p. 122).

86 Sergeant, pp. 165-6. Sergeant also comments: "There was so much she did not want to see and saw not. What she did see she had selected instinctively and so made her own" (Sergeant, p. 46).

87 Quoted Sergeant, p. 200.

88 Sergeant, p. 166.

89 Sergeant, p. 167.

90 Sergeant, p. 167.

91 Sergeant, p. 209. Contrast O'Neill's statement in "The playwright of today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it--the death of the old God, and the failure of science and materialism to give a satisfactory new one for the religious instincts to find a meaning for life in and to comfort its fears of death with" (quoted in Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion, Chicago: Willet Clark, 1934, p. 22). In truth this is exactly what Cather purposed to do in her fiction but in her own terms!

92 Sergeant, p. 200.

93 James Schroeter places her in the line of modern American fiction: "At the time that Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright were creating a new American architecture in the Midwest, Dreiser, Anderson, Willa Cather, Sandburg, and Lewis were establishing a new literature. All these writers grew up in small Midwestern villages, and their real contact with cities did not come until after their ideas and attitudes had been pretty firmly moulded The story makes a pattern which can be read in several ways--as the escape from the horrors of corn-belt provincialism, the tragic-hegira from pastoral innocence, or the conquest of civilization and the Bright Medusa but however it is read, it is the story of Dreiser, Anderson, Willa Cather, and the young writers who came after them, Fitzgerald and Hemingway; and the story that they told over and over again in their novels" ("Willa Cather and The Professor's House, in Schroeter ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, pp. 380). Zabel connects her to this tradition as well: "She was one of the last in a long line of elegists of American innocence and romantic heroism that virtually dates from the beginning of a conscious native artistry in American literature (Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 217-8). "Talents who came after her have written books that surpass hers in conflict and comprehension, as in difficulty and courage [as Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Katharine Anne Porter] Yet she did something in a time of distraction and cultural inflation to make the way clear for them, as much by the end she defined for one tradition as by the example of tenacity and personal scruple she set for herself" (pp. 226-7). And she shares what Wright Morris considers to be common characteristics of the best American writers: the assumption that a long adolescence with intense preoccupations is fortunate, the depiction of a tension between the

imaginary past and the raw material of the present, the romantic belief that failure is greater than success, and the artist's fear of life without art (The Territory Ahead, Harcourt Brace, 1957, pp. 24, 26-7, 30 and 36).

⁹⁴ New York Times Dec. 20, 1930, quoted in Bennett, p. 255.
See also p. 26.

⁹⁵ Brown, pp. 77-8.

⁹⁶ See Luccock, p. 195.

⁹⁷ "The Novel D  meubl  ", On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 43. Brown notes that her power in these later novels is "the power of pictures, the power of symbol, the power of structure, the power of style". Her essential subject is a "state of mind or feeling" and "her fiction became a kind of symbolism, with the depths and suggestions that belong to symbolist art, and with the devotion to a music of style and structure" (pp. 90-1).

⁹⁸ See Randall, p. 18 quoted p. 12.

⁹⁹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, N.Y.: New American Library, Signet, 1962, p. 226.

¹⁰⁰ Bennett, p. 139.

¹⁰¹ Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 261. See also Cather's article on "Youth" in McClure's Magazine: "The individual possesses this power for only a little while. He is sent into the world charged with it, but he can't keep it a day beyond his allotted time. He has his hour when he can do, live, become. If he devoted these years to caring for an aged parent--God may reward him but Nature will not forgive him" (quoted Sergeant, p. 204). Cather's preoccupation with youth was so intense that she altered her birth date from 1873 to 1876, discovered by E. K. Brown (See p. 17 note.)

¹⁰² Beebe, pp. 91, 97.

¹⁰³ Beebe, p. 97.

¹⁰⁴ My Mortal Enemy, p. 94.

105 Sergeant, pp. 182-3. Wright Morris notes that Cather shares with the best American writers the assumption that a long adolescence with intense perceptions is fortunate (pp. 26-7).

106 Morris, p. 88.

107 Sergeant, p. 182.

108 This passage is quoted from Throckmorton's unpublished thesis 'Willa Cather, Artistic Theory and Practice', University of Kansas, 1954, p. 93 note 43.

109 Sergeant, p. 139.

110 Sergeant, p. 272-3.

111 Preface to Not Under Forty.

112 Brynner, pp. 337-8. Morton Zabel observes, "The space of seventy years is too short in human history, even in modern history, to permit anyone to claim that he saw the world break in two during it. The measure of the human fate is not to be calculated so conveniently, even in a century of disturbance like the twentieth, and least of all in the moral perspective to which the artist or serious moralist must address himself. To do so is to impose a personal sentiment on something too large to contain it. It was to such sentiment, with its attendant didacticism and inflexibility, that Willa Cather came to submit. But it also must be granted that she did live through a cleavage and crisis in something more than American life; that she saw the end of an era. . . . She did not succeed in surmounting the confines of her special transition and the resentment it induced in her, and she did not write the kind of books that assure the future or the energy of a literature. That opportunity she consciously rejected" (in Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 226).

113 Sergeant, p. 121. Lewis comments that "she felt very strongly about the war from its beginning, for it threatened everything in the world of the mind's endeavour that was most precious to her; she saw it beforehand, I think, as many people saw it afterward" (Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 117). Yet there is little trace of this prescience in her work before 1922!

114 Yeats, "The Second Coming".

- 115 Hardy quoted in Luccock, p. 1.
- 116 Quoted in Luccock, p. 17.
- 117 Leonard Woolf, Beginning Again, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1964, p. 145.
- 118 Woolf, pp. 146-7.
- 119 C. P. Snow, Two Cultures, Cambridge: University Press, 1965, p. 25.
- 120 Snow, p. 25-6.
- 121 Not Under Forty, pp. 58-61.
- 122 Not Under Forty, p. 46.
- 123 Sergeant, p. 164.
- 124 Jones, p. 3.
- 125 J. Donald Adams, The Shape of Books to Come, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1944, p. 123.
- 126 Sergeant, p. 164. She pointed out that there were "classes and masses" here too and asked whether the Pueblo Indians had any part in American democracy. But "Willa did not ask herself such questions".
- 127 Sergeant, p. 164. Lewis denies that Cather is antiquarian: "she did not care for old things because they were old or curious or rare--she cared for them only as they expressed the human spirit and human lot on earth" (Lewis, p. 119-20). Yet Sergeant observes that she had refused to have a car or even a radio (p. 202); when she received an honorary Litt. D. from Princeton University she refused to talk over to the microphone to respond and when she received the Prix Fémina Américain for Shadows on the Rock in 1932 she only accepted the prize and the ceremony attending it on the promise that there should be no photographers (Sergeant, p. 246). In "The Old Beauty" the chief character dies after a car accident in Italy, not from the physical injuries but from the horror of her contact with modern young America.

128 Hicks, p. 226. Hicks continues that this is not the past from which the present has sprung, nor does it help us to understand our age; she "has simply projected her own desires into the past; her longing for heroism, her admiration for natural beauty, her desire--intensified by preoccupation with doubt and despair--for the security of an unquestioned faith" and he concludes "Miss Cather has never once tried to see contemporary life as it is; she sees only that it lacks what the past, at least in her idealization of it, had. Thus she has been barred from the task of the great artist: the expression of what is central and fundamental in her own age" (pp. 709, 708). Trilling in "The Sense of the Past" claims that the poet exists in connection to the past for he chronicles personal, national, and cosmological events but adds, "it is only if we are aware of the reality of the past as past that we can feel it as alive and present" as in Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Perhaps this is Cather's problem; she cannot accept these eras as past. Kohler claims that in Cather the sense of the past is contrasted with the change of the present--"The past cuts backward into time, but . . . whatever is thought or felt in memory throws its light upon a life of present mood and action" ("Willa Cather", College English IX, Oct. 1947, pp. 15-16)--and Van Ghent would agree: "the boldest and most beautiful of Willa Cather's fictions are characterized by a sense of the past not as an irrecoverable quality of events, wasted, in history, but as a persistent human truth repossessed--salvaged, redeemed--by virtue of memory and art" (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 5). Yet Hoffman observes that she "created an image of history, made of simple and primary qualities, isolated in the past, free from the complications of modern life, with standards so purified as almost to make each human act a ritual exemplar" (The Twenties, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 189) and Hatcher calls her "the most talented of our escapists" (Creating the Modern American Novel, N.Y.: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935, p. 69).

129 Randall, p. 374.

130 Lecture on Tolstoi and Joyce by John Henry Raleigh, The Joyce Symposium, Dublin, June 14, 1969.

131 Quoted Lecture on Tolstoi and Joyce, note 123 above.

132 Stuart Sherman, Critical Woodcuts, N.Y.: Scribner's, 1926, p. 32-3, 37.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE ORDER OF NATURE

¹ Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" in Essays on the History of Ideas, Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1948, p. 24 note.

² Emerson, "Nature" in Selected Prose and Poetry, New York, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1960, p. 4.

³ J. W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1936, p. 32.

⁴ Beach, p. 36.

⁵ Beach, p. 17.

⁶ Beach p.17-20.

⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy quoted in M. E. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp N.Y.: Norton, 1958 p. 198. See also Clough's definition of Nature as landscape; Puritan "natural depravity"; nature and nature's laws; social, moral and political order based on rightness of reason (This Necessary Earth, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964, pp. 102-3).

⁸ Cather, interview by Eva Mahoney in the Omaha Sunday World Herald Nov. 27, 1921 quoted Mildred Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 139.

⁹ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 49.

¹⁰ Sergeant, p. 79.

¹¹ Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land, New York, Vintage Books, 1957, p. 138.

¹² Smith, pp. 55-6.

¹³ Smith, pp. 56-8.

¹⁴ Roy W. Meyer, The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p. 31.

¹⁵ Sergeant, p. 166.

¹⁶ Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, New York: Macmillan, 1962, p. 328.

¹⁷ James D. Hart, The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 4th ed. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1965, pp. 487, 702. He defines "local-colour" as applied to: "fiction or verse which emphasizes its setting, being concerned with the character of a district or an era, as marked by its customs, dialect, costumes, landscapes, or other peculiarities that have escaped standardizing cultural influences." (487). In contrast to regional literature it "emphasizes a special geographic setting and concentrates upon the history, manners and folkways of the area as these help to shape the lives or behaviour of the characters. . . . It lays less stress upon quaint oddities of dialect, mannerisms, and costume, and more on basic philosophical and sociological distinctions which the writer views as though he were a cultural anthropologist" (p. 702).

¹⁸ Major, Smith, Pearce, Southwest Heritage, Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1938, pp. 206-7.

¹⁹ Quoted Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1941, pp. 206-7.

²⁰ John T. Flanagan, "The Middle Western Farm Novel" in Minnesota History, vol. 23, June 1942, p. 124.

²¹ John R. Milton, "The Western Novel: Sources and Forms" in Chicago Review, 16, Summer 1963, p. 75.

²² Milton, p. 92.

²³ Milton, p. 81.

²⁴ Milton, p. 91.

²⁵ Milton, p. 88.

²⁶ Willa Cather, On Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 49.

²⁷ On Writing, p. 49.

- 28 On Writing, p. 55.
- 29 On Writing, pp. 48-49.
- 30 On Writing, p. 58.
- 31 On Writing, p. 56.
- 32 Willa Cather, My Antonia, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961), p. 353.
- 33 My Ántonia, Introduction.
- 34 Sergeant, p. 120.
- 35 Willa Cather, Youth and the Bright Medusa, New York: Knopf, 1961, pp. 225-6.
- 36 Willa Cather, Alexander's Bridge, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1962, Preface p. vii.
- 37 Sergeant, p. 92.
- 38 Willa Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 308.
- 39 O Pioneers!, p. 15.
- 40 O Pioneers!, p. 20.
- 41 O Pioneers!, p. 3.
- 42 My Ántonia, p. 8.
- 43 My Ántonia, p. 16.
- 44 My Ántonia, pp. 63-4.
- 45 Willa Cather, "Neighbour Rosicky" in Obscure Destinies, N.Y.: Knopf, 1960, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Willa Cather, "142 Charles Street" in Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 374.

⁴⁸ The Song of the Lark, p. 375.

⁴⁹ The Song of the Lark, p. 408.

⁵⁰ The Song of the Lark, p. 369.

⁵¹ The section is strongly autobiographical and is transferred directly from Cather's own experience to Thea Kronberg's. It is more fitting to the career of a novelist than a singer and indicates one of a number of places where Cather allowed her own interests to draw her away from logical characterization. See the effect of the Southwest and the Pueblos on Cather herself, Sergeant, pp. 123, 282.

⁵² O Pioneers!, p. 15.

⁵³ Sergeant, p. 120.

⁵⁴ Flanagan, p. 124.

⁵⁵ Meyers notes that Willa Cather's novels reveal the "first sympathetic handling of this subjective mid-West farm fiction" (p. 44) "Miss Cather's significance in a chronological survey of the literature of pioneering is that it was in her novels that the story of the pioneers' struggle to subdue the land and of the immigrant to adjust to the new environment was first raised to the level of high art" (p. 47).

⁵⁶ Meyer, pp. 183-7. See chart, p. 178.

⁵⁷ Meyer, p. 31.

⁵⁸ See Smith, Virgin Land, p. 145.

⁵⁹ Virgin Land, pp. 141-3.

⁶⁰ Virgin Land, p. 138.

61 Willa Cather, Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, p. 97.

62 William Wordsworth, "Lines Written in Early Spring".

63 J. W. Beach draws a parallel between the mediaeval Catholic concept of Nature as a revelation of God and the Romantic concept of Nature as benevolent, beautiful, orderly, harmonious and purposive: "With the waning of religious faith he [the poet] grasps at nature--at the great benevolent order of things in which every individual is provided for in the harmonious plan of the whole; which speaks to him through every lovely and sublime object, and in whose eternal flux, while he may be lost, he is yet not ineffectual or without significance. The heart of nature-poetry is the sense a man has of his identity with the other manifestations of this living force, with the living force itself--his envelopment by and absorption in nature (The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1936, pp. 8-9). According to Beach's interpretation, Wordsworth's chief concern in the nature poems of 1898 was "to show how the beautiful and noble objects of nature become associated in one's mind with esthetic-moral ideas: How by this means one's personal mood is improved, one's character is strengthened, one's attitude towards men is humanized, and one is enabled to 'see into the life of things'--that is, one is given insight into the spiritual governance of the universe" (p. 128). Henry Steele Commager notes that Cather shares "that romantic tradition, so strong in American literature and art, that saw nature splendid in all its manifestations and man virtuous only when he accommodated himself to nature--the tradition that stretched, politically, from Jefferson to Bryan, that found literary expression in so many writers from Cooper to Rolvaag, that was reflected in the work of naturalists like Burroughs and Muir and in landscape painters from the Hudson River School to Winslow Homer and Grant Wood" (from The American Mind in Schroeter, Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 211).

64 Willa Cather, A Lost Lady, p. 169.

65 Sergeant, p. 256.

66 Willa Cather in Europe, N.Y.: Knopf, 1956, pp. 170-1.

67 In Europe, p. 120.

68 In Europe, pp. 120-1.

69 In Europe, p. 169.

⁷⁰Edith Lewis, p. 120.

⁷¹Lafarge, "The future of Religious Symbolism--A Catholic View" in E. E. Johnson, ed. Religious Symbolism, N.Y.: Harper Bros., 1955, p. 221.

⁷²Milton, p. 93. He points out that the agricultural community itself becomes a frontier, dividing society and culture from the life of the pioneer with its freedom from restraint and its stress upon individualism (p. 93). See also Smith, p. 250. Hubbell in his essay on The Frontier indicates that it provided a new field for material and a new point of view for American literature; it could deal with man's closeness to nature, the contrast of races, and pioneer life with its adventure, freedom and change and it could present new types of literary characters in the pioneer, the trader, the cowboy, the Indian, the mountaineer. Yet few succeeded in recording this life in literature with the exception of Cooper and later Garland (in The Reinterpretation of American Literature ed. N. Foerster, N.Y.: Russell and Russell, 1959, pp. 44-6).

⁷³Milton, pp. 97-100.

⁷⁴See Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 54-6.

⁷⁵Virgin Land, p. 77. For this interpretation, see Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 68-77.

⁷⁶Meyer, p. 79. Smith suggests that in the New England Puritan tradition, emigration was an escape from order and religion and therefore evil and depraved (p. 251). He finds that Cooper in The Prairie and Home As Found realized the need for gradation and difference in wealth before art, culture, graces and refinement could be attained. Those who did not agree in theory nevertheless had nothing to make in practice. The interest of the West lay largely in its differences from the East (pp. 256-60).

⁷⁷Garland too recognized that the movement of civilization was simultaneously "epic" in its breaking up of the earth, and tragic in its tearing down of the Wild life, the prairie wolves, the swarming insect life, the native plants and flowers, "native here for untold centuries" (A Son of the Middle Border, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1962, pp. 88-9).

78 Meyer, p. 34.

79 See Smith, Virgin Land, who points out that the wild west was primitive and not yet defined by rules of society; the political ideal of an egalitarian yeomen society was not compatible with the literary ideal of gentility and refinement fitting for the aristocracy and there were no literary precedents for such a literature (p. 246).

80 Virgin Land, pp. 246-7. See also pp. 71-5.

81 Forster, Aspects of the Novel, pp. 77 ff.

82 In Europe, pp. 132-3. For example, she says of the tradespeople: "She found them more real and interesting than conventional people with smooth surfaces and punctilious manners" (Sergeant, p. 116). This is largely because they are more highly coloured; she sees them as she would like them to be rather than as they are. See the comments on the characterization of Antonia pp. 57-8.

83 In Europe, pp. 132-3.

84 Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead, Harcourt Brace, 1957, p. 191.

85 See The Song of the Lark, p. 28.

86 Sergeant, p. 123.

87 Clough, p. 47.

88 Clough, p. 49.

89 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 41.

90 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 257-8.

91 Clough, p. 78.

92 Hicks, "The Development of Civilization in Sources of Culture in the Middle West, D.R. Fox ed., N.Y.: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1934, pp. 96-7.

93 Emerson Hough, 'The Passing of the Frontier',
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918, p. 3.

94 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 76-7.

95 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 75.

96 A Lost Lady, p. 55.

97 A Lost Lady, pp. 168-9.

98 Hazard points out in The Frontier in American Literature that ultimately the frontier is related to business interests: it emphasizes a rampant individualism which could always retreat from a society becoming stratified, abundant natural resources which promise prosperity to all and prizes for the superman, and a philosophy of pragmatism which would accept no checks from tradition, class or government (p. 210). Thus Hazard would recognize the connection which Daiches points out between the railway pioneer Captain Forrester and the commercialization of modern society which Cather claims destroys Marian Forrester.

99 Geismar, p. 183. See also Brown; "[Cather's] pioneers will not quite bear the weight she assigns to them. . . . It is a simple thing to grant that men in the habit of great affairs, men for whom the breaking of new ground is the breath of life, 'great-hearted adventurers', are of another and higher kind than small-town shysters, vulgarians and gossips. But Miss Cather . . . asks us to believe that as a group, by definition, her builders and founders have a spiritual breadth, a heroic wisdom, for which it is difficult to extort our assent. . . . [We feel] that she has built them up somewhat artificially out of a need to annihilate the petty present. . . . [that they] are not grand enough for their role ('Willa Cather' in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 78).

100 Brown compares these two figures; A Lost Lady, he says, contrasts "a dying way of life which is spacious and noble and a new way which is petty and crude. The figure that primarily represents the old way has a grandeur that had not been within her [Cather's] reach before, a poetic beauty. In old Captain Forrester, Archbishop Latour is already implicit" (Brown in Schroeter, p. 76).

101 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 277.

102 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 19.

103 Sergeant, p. 273.

104 "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle" in Nation, Sept. 5, 1923, p. 238. At this time Cather had not yet abandoned hope. At graveyards of Norsks, Bohemians, "I have always the hope that something went into the ground with those pioneers that will one day come out again. Something that will come out not only in sturdy traits of character, but in elasticity of mind, in an honest attitude towards the realities of life, in certain qualities of feeling and imagination. . . . It is in that great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West that we may hope to see the hard molds of American provincialism broken up; that we may hope to find young talent which will challenge the pale proprieties, the insincere, conventional optimism of our art and thought (Nebraska, pp. 237-8).

105 William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey", lines 1151-2.

106 John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale", line 52.

107 Henry Thoreau, Variorum Walden, N.Y.: Washington Square Press Inc., 1966, p. 67.

108 Walden, p. 244. Yet Morris points out that there is no sequel to Walden (p. 44).

109 Morris, p. 14.

110 Morris, p. xvi.

111 O Pioneers!, p. 118.

112 Willa Cather, The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 265.

113 Morris, p. 4.

114 Sergeant, pp. 81-2.

115 Sergeant, p. 164.

116 Sergeant, p. 204.

117 Sergeant, p. 118.

118 "Neighbour Rosicky", Obscure Destinies, N.Y.: Knopf, 1960, p. 60.

119 "Neighbour Rosicky", in Obscure Destinies, p. 61.

120 My Antonia, p. 18.

121 Obscure Destinies, pp. 70-1.

122 Sergeant, p. 281 from My Antonia, p. 18.

CHAPTER 2: O PIONEERS!

1. Quoted from Cather's Interview to Eva Mahoney, Omaha Sunday World Herald, Nov. 17, 1921 in Mildred Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 139.

² Quoted Bennett, pp. 200-201.

³ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 97.

⁴ Sergeant, pp. 91-2. Cather continues ". . . like Dvorák's New Symphony which program notes always said was based on Negro melodies. She knew better. Dvorák had actually spent several weeks in Nebraska, in the early eighties. Yes, her themes were all there, but something had to happen to herself before they could rise up and reach her ear, and take form in her mind". Cather later defined her idea of a novel in her letter "On Death Comes for the Archbishop": "A novel, it seems to me, is merely a work of the imagination in which a writer tries to present the experiences and emotions of a group of people by the light of his own". (On Writing, New York: Knopf, (1936) 1964, pp. 12-13). Critical comments on the novel are on the whole favourable. Although Snell finds the theme suffers from disunity and the whole lacks a sense of progression, he admires its "warmth, gusto, tenderness, and a largeness of humanity" ("Edith Wharton and Willa Cather" in The Shapers of American Fiction, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton, 1947, p. 151). Kohler claims O Pioneers! to be "Emersonian in its awareness of man's potentialities and his greatness or smallness in living them out" ("Willa Cather", College English IX, October 1947, p. 11), and Randall who points out many flaws nevertheless comments that of Cather's novels, O Pioneers! is the broadest in sympathy and the greatest in emotional depth (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 76). The reaction of Cather's contemporaries is represented by the reassurance of H.Q.M. (Helen Quincey Muirhead): "The story of the pioneer Puritans, 'our overrated progenitors' . . . had been a hundred times told. . . like the story of the covered-wagon days. But this fiercely untamed, untrammelled, sweeping natural world of the Divide, of which the author gave such rare and measured visual images, had new, almost cosmic vistas, overtones and undertones. Though the story unfolded with deceptive simplicity, it had majesty, even terror. The author seemed to be looking through objective lenses at something new God had made" (quoted by Sergeant, pp. 95-6).

⁵ Hicks comments that the episodic method of the novel

results from this very "reliance on unity of tone rather than firmness of structure" ("The Case Against Willa Cather", English Journal, XXII, Nov. 1933, p. 704), and Randall observes that this "aim at producing a single unified impression" results from her change in technique, her new form and use of imagery to produce a novel which is scenic rather than dramatic: "Instead of the presentation and resolution of a conflict we get the distillation of an emotion" (pp. 63-4).

⁶ Cather, The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 251.

⁷ All page references in the text are taken from O Pioneers!, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1962.

⁸ Walt Whitman, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" from Leaves of Grass edited by Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1965), 1968, Stanzas 4-7.

⁹ Whitman, Stanzas 16-17.

¹⁰ Josephine, Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists, N.Y.: Richard R. Smith, 1950, 113-4. She observes also that Cather chooses the immigrant protagonist like Conrad chooses the sea, "to show people up for what they are", particularly their capacity for adjustment (p. 113). Quinn agrees that the novel is "not a saga of the pioneers" and claims that John Bergson's failure is a real weakness in the structure of the novel and a shift away from the centre of interest ("Willa Cather" in American Fiction, N.Y.: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1936, p. 686). And Hazard indicates the difference between Cather's view and Whitman's when he comments that the creative pioneers love the frontier "not for what it is but for what they are going to make of it"; they are Puritan in their origin and they regard those who cannot see their dream with the hatred of the religious to the blasphemer of the sacred (The Frontier in American Literature, N.Y.: Barnes and Noble, 1941, p. 26).

¹¹ This structure has been the source of much criticism. Whipple finds the novel divided between these two themes and therefore not focussed ("Willa Cather" in Spokesmen, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1963, 142-3) and Footman comments that while Marie's story is a counterpoise to the story of Alexandra it disturbs the focus ("The Genius of Willa Cather", American Literature 10, 1938-9, 132). Van Ghent feels that the two parts have no formal rationale, and the Alexandra story is fluid and featureless without a backbone of structure (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 15). But see Cather's own comments pp. 75-6 and my discussion of the relationship of the two plots, pp. 78-9.

¹² Daiches comments that the emotional pattern of the novel is not consistent and that the ending is "less a resolution of the personal tragedy than an ignoring of it. We are back to the pioneering theme again, to the lyrical mood of reminiscence and wonder. The novel has no real "katharsis" because it ends by turning away from the tragic elements rather than by subsuming them in a larger pattern" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 23-7). See pp. 106-7 and note 37.

¹³ Sergeant, p. 92.

¹⁴ Rapin finds that the novel lacks unity of time and place since the Nebraska of Book I is different to that of Book II; the interest of Book I is the heroic struggle against a hostile nature, and of Book II, the interrelationships of the Bergson family and Marie (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, p. 22).

¹⁵ Randall notes that the precariousness of civilization on the prairies is symbolic of the precariousness of life. To it there are two responses: the heroic are challenged by it, the unheroic fail (pp. 68-9).

¹⁶ Randall notes the use of sexual imagery for the land which indicates that Alexandra's role here is masculine; the breaking of the soil is the only achievement of her generation (p. 72). The use of geometric imagery for nature indicates the imposition of order on nature in Book II (p. 71).

¹⁷ Giannone claims that Carl left the Divide "because he saw no relationship between himself and the land. . . . Never having understood it then, yet eager to know it now, he finds it wholly unrecognizable. . . . It still tells him nothing about himself" (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 74-5). Carl of course left the Divide first at fifteen, when his parents moved away, a not unnatural thing to do. Later Carl's nostalgia becomes Cather's for she too unconsciously prefers the old land.

¹⁸ Dorothy Van Ghent claims that the archaic dream of the life principle in the form of a guardian god is really the unconscious with a strength above the personal (p. 17). But this dream is related clearly to this second quotation which Van Ghent does not observe. Sister Charles is more accurate when she connects it to the Eros-Thanatos principle of Cather's fiction. While Alexandra is at first an Eros figure with a "strong drive toward life in its totality", after the death of Emil, this dream figure merges with Death which

Alexandra now accepts as a lover, and Eros disappears in Part V (unpublished thesis, "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 32).

¹⁹ Daiches finds Alexandra not real in her close identification as the Earth Mother or Corn Goddess, and the human drama is left to the lesser characters. Alexandra is primarily a symbol of the success of the pioneers (p. 27).

²⁰ Giannone comments on the kinship between "the man who gives form to the thing within and the man who gives form to the soil" (p. 69).

²¹ See Cather, Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 97.

²² See note 11 above.

²³ Cather wrote the poem in 1912 after a trip to the Southwest; she was at the time writing "The White Mulberry Tree" to become the Emil-Marie subplot. See Sergeant pp. 84-5.

²⁴ Randall notes that the poem introduces the two themes of the novel, youth and the land and the tension between strength and harshness, creation and destruction. The emotional power of the novel arises from the conflict between the fascination and the terror of love, whether for the land or for people. The universe itself is indifferent to man and human emotion is the only living thing (p. 65).

²⁵ William Curtin observes that John Bergson's grave is a referrent in the novel. Their love begins where Emil is cutting the grass over the grave in Book II which suggests that death unites the lovers and is inevitable and ends in Book V where Alexandra mourns them in the grave (unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," The University of Wisconsin, 1959, pp. 60, 69).

²⁶ Randall objects that while Crazy Ivar, like Leatherstocking, should be a noble character in contact with noble things, Cather suggests here that nature, instead of ennobling man, can only prevent him from degrading himself. Yet it is Ivar who must find the lovers and bear the tale of the tragedy so that even he cannot separate himself from evil (p. 82).

²⁷ See My Ántonia, pp. 219-220.

28 See Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 35.

29 The resemblance to the Archbishop is strong and suggests that they may have been partly modelled on the same person. See pages 19, 209. The walnut secretary recurs through Cather's fiction, usually belonging to one of Cather's aristocrats, John Bergson, Archbishop Latour, Eugene Auclair although Claude Wheeler's father too has one. The walnut secretary belonged in real life to Cather's father.

30 For the commonness of this theme see for example My Ántonia p. 198, Edna Ferber's So Big and Giant, Rølvaag's Peder Victorious.

31 Giannone would disagree. He notes similar indications of Millie's talents, particularly the piano which Alexandra promises her, and concludes: "In fine, Millie is something of a cultural custodian, and her musical ability forecasts a rich spiritual increase from the little beginnings of civilization as the cycle of prairie life moves into an upward course" (p. 81). But what then of Alexandra's statement that, with Emil gone, there is none to inherit her love of the land, a property of all Cather's real artists? The tone of the book indicates that there is no hope for human relationships and certainly Millie does not replace Emil as the artist of the future.

32 Sister Colette Toler is the only critic of Cather who has also noted these references to Carl as a Catherian artist (unpublished thesis, 'Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather, University of Notre Dame: 1965, p. 170).

33 See Cather's criticism of china-painting in Part II, Introduction pp. 194-5 and My Ántonia pp. 201, 212.

34 That Cather specifies Guonod's "Ave Maria" Giannone finds significant since it indicates Emil's appreciation for his romantic lyricism; Emil projects his own profane longing for Maria into devotion for the virgin (pp. 78-9).

35 Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958, p. 12. See Part III, Introduction pp. 412 for discussion of this definition.

36 Geismar remarks on the increasing note of Catholicism in the novel; Marie counters the Protestant Alexandra who is too stoical and remote ("Willa Cather" in The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 163).

37 Takano Fumi notes the resignation of Alexandra which, like that of Professor St. Peter, is a process of spiritual death and rebirth: "It is the taste of death--the feeling of getting cold clear through--that reconciles Alexandra to life. If life is to have meaning, life is to be endured, if it is to be made acceptable to man--to the modern man with his endless strife and anguish--it must be grasped through death" ("Willa Cather: Her Interpretation of Life and Art", Tsuda Review V, 1960, p. 8).

38 Auchincloss remarks "The whole episode of the Shabatas and Alexandra's later visit to the crazed husband in prison seems basically irrelevant to the story of the land" (Pioneers and Care-takers, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965, p. 99). His observation indicates that he has missed the whole second theme of the novel. While the section is admittedly contrived and overly dramatic, the idea behind it of suffering and purgation through loss and resignation is an important aspect of the novel which Cather does not often deal with in her later more technically perfect novels.

39 On Cather's final attitude to nature there have been several comments. Curtin suggests that the ending is stoic or pessimistic despite the lyric setting: "Miss Cather seems to be suggesting that nature is good, but that man's place in it is one of suffering" (p. 73). Through her choice of nature she attempted to present a broad point of view to comprehend both man and his mutability (p. 74) but while the emphasis of the natural description is on creation rather than destruction, when she attempted to resolve this in terms of character, she was trapped by her view that once youth is gone, the future looks pessimistic. In O Pioneers! she tried to end with a picture of the world that transcends human suffering, but the ending only serves to make the human predicament more grim (p. 81). Randall develops a similar point when he suggests that for Cather, love of the land was safe and love of human beings not safe (p. 104). O Pioneers! really ends in defeat, for the world of nature becomes a substitute for human relationships (p. 72). Although Cather valued spontaneity in human affairs and portrayed it in Marie, the death of Marie becomes a case against spontaneity and not only Emil and Marie but Amédée die for it. He links Cather's connection of danger and sex with the unhappy marriage themes of The Song of the Lark, My Antonia, One of Ours, Maggie in Death Comes for the Archbishop, and My Mortal Enemy, and concludes that Cather finds permanent relationships between men and women wholly unsatisfactory (pp. 94-5). Like Crazy Ivar who indulges his feet to save his desires from hurting others, Cather maintains her equilibrium only at the cost of turning away from life and human relationships (p. 88). And Daiches finds that the ending indicates no real hope in America. The old generation is allowed to live on through Carl and Alexandra but they never discover the challenge of living (pp. 20-21). The frontier tradition is only significant when it interacts with European memories and ideals (p. 21).

CHAPTER 3: MY ÁNTONIA

¹ All page references in the text are from My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961.

² O Pioneers!, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1962, p. 118.

³ Randall adopts the image "The Garden of the World" from Smith's Virgin Land to express the imagery of the novel which "develops the fecundity of nature, of wheat and men." He notes that in Mr. Shimerda's garden there are even benches to discuss philosophy, indicating man's "right relationship to nature". The Garden then becomes a sanctuary cutting out the processes even of the farm itself, the elements, heat and cold, while Ántonia is an Eve figure who imposes order on Nature and founds a family (The Landscape and the Looking Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 142-3). Randall contrasts the two novels: In My Ántonia, the order is organic and cyclic; in O Pioneers! it is superimposed in accord with the vegetation myth. O Pioneers! confronts the conflict in life and finds no solution; My Ántonia is more affirmative, less honest, and the heroine's triumph is effortless. It is the agrarian idyll and therefore less original. In O Pioneers! the soil is fertile and the human beings sterile, while in My Ántonia both are fertile. Cather, he comments, was "only half aware of the vegetation myth and substitutes Platonic essences for birth, love and death. Her desire was "to freeze the world in the grip of form once the ideal is achieved" (pp. 148-50). Yet Randall calls it "in a profound sense. . . the most affirmative book Willa Cather ever wrote" (p. 148). Contemporary opinion was on the whole favourable. W. C. Brownell wrote to one of Cather's associates at McClure's: "At first I thought it was casual and episodic (though so well written, so simple, so obviously saying all it felt and with such ease) and though large-minded and as unmeretricious as salt itself, still rather a desultory document of Western civilization. But ere long it differentiated itself imperceptibly and subtly into a picture crowded with real people, made somehow real, given souls, by--well, by what? I don't know. I don't remember any art more essentially elusive" (quoted in Brown, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. 204-5). On July 25, 1930, Justice O. W. Holmes wrote to Mr. Greenslet of My Ántonia: "It has unfailing charm, perhaps not to be defined; a beautiful tenderness, a vivifying imagination that transforms but does not distort or exaggerate order, proportion. It is a poem made from nature from which only a genius could make it: that being read establishes itself as true, and makes the reader love his country more" (quoted Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, pp. 244-5). Yet the New York

Herald Review of October 6, 1918, commented: "I regret to see a writer of such fine literary quality as Miss Willa S. Cather seek expression through those dreary channels that traverse life on the Western Prairies like so many irrigation ditches. . . . As a novel, it will prove a disappointment to every one who has read Miss Cather's earlier work" (quoted in Lewis, *Willa Cather Living*, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 107). Mrs. Fields also disliked it, complaining that James and Dickens always chose gentle folk for their heroes (Lewis, p. 107).

Quinn calls it "not one of her best novels" (*American Fiction*, N.Y.: Appleton-Century, 1936, p. 687) and Rapin claims it is "inferior to *O Pioneers!* in warmth of passion, to *The Song of the Lark* in variety and scope of interest, and has the defects in structure of both" (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, p. 47). Daiches finds it "A flawed novel full of life and interest and possessing a powerful emotional rhythm in spite of its imperfect structural pattern" (Willa Cather: *A Critical Introduction*, N.Y.: Collier Books, (1951), 1962, p. 47). Yet Wallace Stegner has remarked that if every novelist is born to write one thing "then the one thing Willa Cather was born to write was fully realized in *My Ántonia*" ("Willa Cather" in *The American Novel*, Stevens, ed. N.Y.: Basic Books, 1965, p. 1-4) and Wagenknecht calls it "a touchstone for literary judgement" indicating a taste for literature ("Willa Cather" in *Sewanee Review* XXXVII, 1929, p. 221).

⁴This point has been the subject of much critical dissension. Cather herself evidently intended to focus the novel around Ántonia as Elizabeth Sergeant comments: "[She] placed an old Sicilian apothecary jar of mine, filled with orange and brown flowers of scented stock, in the middle of a bare, round antique table. 'I want my heroine to be like this--like a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides'. She moved the lamp so that the light streamed brightly down on my Taormina jar, with its galzed orange and blue design. 'I want her to stand out--like this; because she is the story'" (Sergeant, p. 139).

Whatever may have been the germinal impression of *My Ántonia*, however, Willa Cather is here explaining her own intuitive response to the projected subject, not to the finished work. She is not always reliable as an interpreter of her own methods. The original preface, rewritten in 1934, states the real intention clearly: "I told him I had always felt that other people--he himself for one--knew her much better than I. I was ready to make an agreement with him; I would set down on paper all that I remembered of Ántonia if he would do the same. We might, in this way get a picture of her. . . . I told him that how he knew her and felt about her was exactly what I most wanted to know about Ántonia. He had had opportunites that I, as a little girl who watched her come and go, had not" (*My Ántonia*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918, pp. xii-xiii). Jim Burden, incidentally, is a fictional character. Randall comments that there is really a double protagonist, representing head and heart, past and present: "Jim completes himself only through Ántonia" (p. 107). See note 8.

⁵ My Ántonia, 1918, p. xii.

⁶ My Ántonia, 1918, p. xiv.

⁷ My Ántonia, 1918, p. xiii.

⁸ The structure of the novel has also occasioned much critical dissension. In truth, it depends largely upon an interpretation of the theme and central character. Both Whipple and Daiches find the centre of the novel in Ántonia. Whipple believes that "the background is almost all required for the presentation of the subject, the portrait of Ántonia, upon which all attention is concentrated" (Spokesmen, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1963, pp. 143), while Daiches finds it episodic. Even Book II is connected tenuously to the main theme which he claims to be the development and self-discovery of the heroine (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 37). "Is it that Jim is fitting himself to be the ideal observer of Ántonia? That seems to be the only way in which this part of the novel can be structurally justified" (p. 42). Thus he traces the structure as Book I, Ántonia; II, Jim; III, life in Nebraska and IV and V, Ántonia and Jim (p. 47). Rapin calls the novel "a striking collection of vignettes" which ought to have been a short story, and suggests that Cather shifts the interest to Ántonia's friends in Book II and III because she cannot hold our attention (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, pp. 47, 49). See also p. 110 note 6. Berthoff refers to it as "a loose chronicle of community remembrance" (The Ferment of Realism, N.Y.: Free Press, 1965, p. 259) and Kronenberger assents when he suggests more aptly "if one took Ántonia out of it (which would not be quite the same thing as taking Hamlet out of Hamlet) we should find remaining, not a composite setting, but a series of pictures, for unlike The Song of the Lark, My Ántonia is not a novel but a chronicle" (p. 136) ("Willa Cather" in Bookman (U.S.) LXXIV, 1931, p. 136). This comment is connected with the remark of Auchincloss: "Certainly without either the title of the novel or the introduction one would never on a first reading (at least until near the end) gather that it is primarily about Ántonia" (in Pioneers and Caretakers, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965, p. 103).

The answer is that it concerns not Ántonia but Jim's Ántonia. As William Curtain notes, the theme of the book is Jim's search for "nostalgia and excitement recollected in tranquillity" (p. 112) and the structure of the novel thus "follows those incidents which Jim found memorable" (unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 117). Miller observes that the novel is organized around "the emotion attached to Ántonia's name" and around Ántonia as symbol of "the undeviating cyclic nature of all life (My Ántonia: A Frontier Drama of Time", American Quarterly X, Spring 1958, p. 480).

The centre of the novel is the narrator, the novel being "the drama of his awakening consciousness, of his growing awareness" (p. 478) and he parallels the structure to the stages of Antonia's life: I, eternal endurance; II, the flowering of the physical woman; III and IV the faithful endurance of the wronged woman and V woman as fulfilled in her destiny (pp. 479-80). Even though he concedes the unity is emotional rather than logical, Miller still finds no place for such incidents as the Peter-Pavel story, and finds the action episodic and abounding in irrelevancies. A recent article by Terence Martin has independently approached the same conclusions as this thesis with regard to structure ("The Drama of Memory in *My Antonia*", *PMLA*, LXXXIII, March 1969). He finds that the point of view of the narrator "defines the theme and structure even as it controls the tone of the narrative. . . . If structural coherence is to be found in *My Antonia*, the character of Jim Burden seems to be necessarily involved. . . . For it is the story of Jim's Antonia (p. 305). The novel is "a drama of memory by means of which Jim Burden tells us how he has come to see Antonia as the epitome of all he has valued. . . . The early sections of *My Antonia* present in retrospect the substance of meaning, conditioned throughout by Jim's assurance of that meaning. The latter sections justify his right to remember the prairie in the joyous manner of his youth" (p. 308).

⁹ But see Martin who says: "A sense of happiness remembered pervades Book I, softening and mellowing the harsher outlines of the story Jim Burden has to tell. We are never really on the prairie with Jim, nor does he try to bring us there. Rather, he preserves his retrospective point of view and tells us what it was like for him on the prairie". Cather maintains narrative distance, even in the scenes of violence, to achieve "a deliberate--and almost total--sacrifice of immediacy in favor of the afterglow of remembrance" (pp. 307-8). While there is much truth in this, nevertheless there is some degree of immediacy in the first three books which is missing in the last two, or perhaps merely a more effective rendering of "felt life".

¹⁰ Miller notes also the cyclic theme of the novel and states that *My Antonia* is "ultimately about time, about the inexorable movement of future into present, of present into past" (pp. 483-4). He suggests that the novel illustrates Turner's concept of the frontier, the order of the novel being determined by successive stages of national development. Book I concerns the testing of man's strength against the prairie; II the cultural evolution of the town; III the rediscovery in Lincoln of the cultural world, theatre and music. In IV although Jim moves East to Harvard, the novel circles back to Antonia (pp. 481-3). Van Ghent too suggests that the novel concerns time and presents the two polarities of life, time and change versus changelessness: "The suffering of change, the sense of irreparable loss in time, is one polarity of the work; the other polarity is the

timelessness of those images associated with *Ántonia*, with the grave of the suicide at the cross-roads, with the mute fortitude of the hired men and the pastoral poetry of the hired girls, and most of all with the earth itself, carrying in mysterious strokes, like the plough hieroglyphed on the sun, signs of an original and ultimate relationship between man and cosmos" (*Willa Cather*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, pp. 24-5).

¹¹ Mrs. Jewett raised this question concerning the tale "On the Gull's Road"; see Brown, *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography*, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 201.

¹² *Sergeant*, p. 151.

¹³ Stated by Cather in an interview in Lincoln on *My Ántonia* and quoted by Brown who notes that these two effects are not compatible (p. 202).

¹⁴ Wagenknecht in "Willa Cather", *Sewanee Review* XXXVII, 1929, p. 221.

¹⁵ See discussion footnotes 4 and 8 above.

¹⁶ Robert Gale, "Willa Cather and the Past", *Studi Americani* IV, 1958, p. 210-11. This is not the direction of Cather's work as a whole for in the novel following *The Professor's House* she abandoned not only the future but the present and even the immediate past.

¹⁷ Martin, p. 308.

¹⁸ Martin, p. 311.

¹⁹ Martin, p. 311.

²⁰ Martin finds that *Ántonia* "fulfills the memory he has treasured" despite his fears that she has changed (p. 311). Surely this indicates that Jim sees in *Antonia* only what he wishes to see, a memory of the past.

²¹ *Georgics* III pp. 49-70 (Vergil, *Eclogues* transl. R. Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols. vol. 1 Rev. London: Heinemann Ltd, 1956, pp. 64-9). The original is as follows: "mitte in Veneram pecuaria primus, atque aliam ex alia generando suffice prolem. Optima quaeque dies miseris mortalibus, aevi prima fugit; suent morbi tristisque senectus et labor,

et durae rapit inclementia mortis. Semper erunt quarum mutari corpora malis. In context, these lines are touched with humour, for they form part of a treatise on cattle-breeding: "The age to bear motherhood and lawful wedlock ends before the tenth year, and begins after the fourth; the rest of their life is neither fit for breeding nor strong for the plough. Meantime, while lusty youth still abides in the herds, let loose the males; be first to send your cattle to mate, and supply stock after stock by breeding. Life's fairest days are ever the first to flee" (pp. 49-70). In his article "An American Georgic: Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*", Curtis Dahl compares Cather to Vergil (*Comparative Literature* VII, 1955, pp. 43-51). Both felt the beautiful fertility of the earth, and understood their native lands in terms of the cultural traditions of the past. For Cather, "optima dies" meant "to restore the Golden Age by a return to agricultural and pastoral life". But Dahl claims, Vergil was not a regionalist as Gaston Cleric claims, for "patria" meant Italy, and he wished to continue the literary tradition of the Greeks (pp. 46-8). While Vergil celebrates rural life, for him it is secondary to the philosophical life; "It is Cather who makes this fertility cult, mystic spiritual power". Vergil is humorous, and factual, not elegaic or romantic, and he pictures the rural life of the present, not the past whereas Cather reads into the lines a "romantic, almost sentimental regionalism and an emotional concern with the passing beauties of youth and primitive ages" (pp. 50-1). See also Adams' comment that it is "the aim of both to describe with poetic fervour a round of rural labour, to show the intimacy of man and nature within that life, to contrast the purity of country life to the luxurious and unsatisfying life outside of it" (unpublished thesis, "Six Novels of Willa Cather: A Thematic Study", Ohio State University, 1961, pp. 4ff.

22 Miller notes that the structure and shaping of the novel follows the pattern of the year and of life, particularly in Book I (pp. 479-80). Martin too notes that Book I follows the pattern of the seasons; "Jim portrays himself predominantly in terms of his reactions to the seasons during his first year on the prairie" (pp. 306-7).

23 Sister Charles comments that Ántonia is an Eros character while her father is a Thanatos character; Jim inherits the Thanatos-nature of Mr. Shimerda through his touch (unpublished thesis, "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 85). See note 53 for further discussion of this theory. Note that Antonia opposes killing p. 342.

24 Randall claims that Cather evades the problem of Evil in the novel. Natural evil she accepts and man may triumph over it as Jim does over the snake, or succumb to it. Man-made evil she evades; Wick Cutter is treated farcically and therefore not to be taken

seriously and his end is melodramatic. Antonia's seduction is second-hand, yet she need not have included it at all and chose to make this incident a part of her story. The suicides of the tramp and Mr. Shimerda are self-inflicted (pp. 121-2). Later he observes that she presents a "series of vignettes or snapshots, each of them commemorating some important event" yet none of evil so that "it seems that her vignettes are meant to present only life's happy and successful moments, and such as showed the triumph of the will. . . . She was failing to see life steadily and see it whole" (p. 147). But Randall neglects the Peter-Pavel story and Krajek; as well as the family of Antonia which he later says Cather makes deliberately "as unattractive as possible" so that Antonia can rebel against the family, become an individualist and yet create a group around herself (pp. 129-30). Certainly these direct presentations of evil disappear after Book II.

25 Many critics find this whole incident extraneous, even Miller who agrees that the centre of the novel is Jim's consciousness. E. K. Brown points out that it seems "sometimes to intrude and delay the march of the story; it was not a part of its organic structure" (p. 259). Only Adams notes that it "exemplifies the savagery in that nature which surrounds them" and that it serves as a link with Jim's Virginia background (p. 13). The tale is really more important than this for it involves a contrast between life and death, between idealism and the reality of survival, between the dream world of Jim and the true world of Pavel.

26 Randall notes that the death of Mr. Shimerda in winter and the frozen blood are part of the submerged vegetation myth; in the next section spring returns and the community lives on (p. 126). Geismar compares the death of Shimerda to that of Addie Bundren in As I Lay Dying and Hemingway's treatment in "Alpine Idylls" in its uprooting effect upon the Shimerdas (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang (1943), 1959, p. 163 ff).

27 Randall notes that Cather "could accept fertility in crops more easily than in human beings, the reason being her fear of physical passion and the dependence upon others it entails". This is evident even in My Antonia, which of all her novels most celebrates fecundity". While we see the crops growing, we never see "a pregnancy or birth directly presented in Willa Cather's novels" and even "Antonia's family is produced ready-made" (p. 148).

28 Randall observes that this passage illustrates Cather's evasion of evil; Mrs. Harling answers "So it is Antonia, . . . Maybe I'll go home and help you thresh next summer. Isn't that taffy nearly ready to eat?" Randall observes: "Here in a nutshell is

one of Willa Cather's most glaring weaknesses; when her mind is presented with something unpleasant, it shies away from it. The problem of evil is posed, but not commented on. Instead she is evasive and changes the subject" (pp. 123-4). See footnote 23 above.

²⁹ Randall finds in this image of Coronado and the subsequent one of the plough against the sun "two opposites which, taken together, are meant to embrace the whole of life" (p. 135). "Coronado stands for the spirit of romance and adventure, and the kind of life young people dream about". Despite the pedants' denial "the spirit of romance has been to this dry, flat country; but the spirit of romance is not enough. It can see things but it cannot persevere. . . . But if the spirit of romance has been to this country, so has the spirit of civilization. This is symbolized by the plough against the sun. The agricultural implement is made the symbol of a whole way of life" (pp. 135-6).

³⁰ See A Lost Lady, N.Y.: Knopf, 1963, p. 168.

³¹ But see Miller note 9 above.

³² Randall points out that the garden here is a sanctuary which is surrounded by "a triple enclosure" and which keeps out even the extremes of heat and cold (p. 142).

³³ See notes 4 and 8 above.

³⁴ In contrast her father represents death: he carries three dead rabbits, and his eyes are deep-set and melancholy while his skin is "like ashes--like something from which all warmth and light had died out" (p. 24).

³⁵ Randall defines her as an Eve figure who founds a family in the Garden, "the mortal who struggles with the adverse powers of nature and conquers them becomes the type of all successful human endeavour and passes over into the realm of myth (pp. 142-3). Martin claims that she is like the country in that "both have yielded life in abundance, both have prevailed" (p. 311). But Geismar asks here "Is it merely in the shadow of Burden's continental sophistication that Antonia now seems so much cruder in sensibility and expression, as well as rather battered in appearance--as though she had reverted in some degree to the line of her peasant ancestors while Jim Burden has moved closer to his own more or less aristocratic forebears? The difference between them has never been quite so apparent (p. 166).

36 Randall claims that "Antonia's great achievement and the chief subject of the book is the founding of a family" (pp. 105-6). While this is perhaps extreme, nevertheless as he observes, My Antonia is unique in Cather's early writing (pp. 129-30) for its presentation of a happy family unit and she clearly finds Jim's lack of family an indication of his failure in life. That this group also has its cost is suggested only briefly later (see page 161).

37 In Book II the Shimerda family disappears and reappears briefly only in Book IV. Randall notes that Cather has made Antonia's family as disagreeable as possible to justify her revolt against them (p. 219). As the book moves progressively towards idyll, these characters must fade out, and they are replaced by the more pleasant children of Antonia whose names are chosen to provide a link with the past incidents of the book. Yet Martin claims that the portrait of the Shimerdas "avoids the trap of sentimentality" and is valid psychologically (pp. 305-6). He remarks that "the antipathy fades completely with time and understanding" due largely to the efforts of Grandfather Burden (p. 306). Given the characters of Mrs. Shimerda and Ambrosch, this would never be possible and Cather solves the dilemma by removing them. Adams claims that the disappearance of the bad qualities of the Shimerda and the presentation of the good after Book I indicates Cather's sentimentality (p. 24) but he later adds that the novel is saved from sentimentality by Jim's perspective concerning the revolt-from-the village (p. 32).

38 Martin suggests that Lena and Antonia are contrasted in Book II "to suggest the different roles each of them will play in the life of Jim Burden" (p. 308). Lena, he says "dominates Book III and comes very close to taking command of the novel" (p. 309). But the book is not extraneous, as suggested by Rapin, who claims that Cather shifts interest to Antonia's friends because Antonia herself cannot hold our attention (p. 49). Lena is opposed to Antonia as an enchantress; she is openly sexual while in the relationship of Jim and Antonia "sexual significance [is] sublimated in terms of youthful fun and adventure". Lena is fatal to memory; she "retards the drama of memory . . . not so much as an anti-theme as a highly diversionary course of inaction". Unlike Antonia, "she can be identified with nothing but herself" (pp. 309-10). While this statement is valid, Martin seems to place over much significance on the role of Lena, to the extent of suggesting that because the "optima dies" meditation is inspired by Lena and not Antonia, it is "an unproductive nostalgia, an indulgence in romantic melancholy" unlike the memories of Antonia (p. 310). He even suggests that Lena's reaping-hook suggests, at one and the same time, "fulfillment, castration and the negation of time" (p. 310); see p. 52.

39 Sergeant, pp. 166-7.

⁴⁰ See Sergeant, p. 167.

⁴¹ Yet Geismar notes that Jim "who is always comparing immigrant vitality with native refinement, . . . can still never quite cross a social line he sees so clearly and detests so strongly" (p. 154), and later marries a society girl who plays patroness to poets and artists (p. 167). Perhaps the reason for this is suggested by Schroeter in his essay "Willa Cather and the Professor's House" in Willa Cather and her Critics, ed. Schroeter, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). He comments on the position of Cather "whose name had so much the right kind of old-stock American ring, and whose commerce with Bohemians and Swedes was a little like that of Jim Burden, the point-of-view character in My Antonia--large-minded and tinged with noblesse oblige" (p. 364).

⁴² See Hemingway's comment on the garbage of civilization in The Green Hills of Africa.

⁴³ See Beebe, p. 6 (Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1964, p. 6); "Quest for self is the dominant theme of the artist novel". See discussion Part II, Introduction, p.228.

⁴⁴ Martin comments that Jim Burden is "the vehicle for her own quest for meaning and value; his success measures her success; his symbol becomes her symbol; for his Antonia is the Antonia she has created for him" (pp. 308 ii). 44b. Sergeant, p. 407.

⁴⁵ Sergeant, p. 149. See also p. 103.

⁴⁶ Stegner comments that Jim Burden must carry the "burden" of the tale--the cultural burden . . . of remaking in the terms of a new place everything that makes life graceful and civilized. . . . In becoming a man of the world, Jim Burden discovers that he has forgotten to be a man from Nebraska" and he must come to reconcile the two halves of himself (The American Novel, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1965, p. 152).

⁴⁷ In the earlier version, Jim explains that the novel will deal with his memories and perceptions, rather than with the real Antonia, and he explains his fictional form: "I should have to do it in a direct way, and say a great deal about myself. It's through myself that I knew and felt her" (My Antonia 1918, p. xiii).

⁴⁸ My Antonia, 1918, pp. xi-xii.

⁴⁹ My Ántonia, 1918, p. xi.

⁵⁰ Brown, p. 201. The original passage is as follows: "When Jim was still an obscure young lawyer, struggling to make his way in New York, his career was suddenly advanced by a brilliant marriage. Genevieve Whitney was the only daughter of a distinguished man. Her marriage with young Burden was the subject of sharp comment at the time. It was said that she had been brutally jilted by her cousin, Rutland Whitney, and that she married this unknown man from the West out of bravado. She was a restless, headstrong girl, even then, who liked to astonish her friends. Later, when I knew her, she was always doing something unexpected. She gave one of her town houses for a Suffragette headquarters, produced one of her own plays at the Princess theatre, was arrested for picketing during a garment-maker's strike, etc. I am never able to believe that she has much feeling for the causes to which she lends her name and her fleeting interest" (My Ántonia, 1918, p. x). Brown observes that the suggestion that Cather too may write a novel raises the question as to "whether it might not have been better told by a woman" (p. 201), a question better evaded. "Unless Jim can satisfy the reader that his impressions and judgements about women are sound, his value as an appreciative recorder of Ántonia is threatened" (p. 201). There is another problem as well, for Genevieve sounds a more vital and dynamic person than Jim, whether Cather liked her or not, and she would threaten to overshadow him.

⁵¹ See Bennett, and discussion in Part II pp.199-200. See also Randall pp. 115, 118. Giannone remarks that Cather "sees in Ántonia's struggle and domesticity so much that is an aspect of the artist. . . . So much about Ántonia is musical in the final harmony she achieves with the world around . . . the unison achieved between her and all of life--a concord between the cadence of the universe and of her spirit. The measure of her artistry is the harmonic activity around the farm . . . All this physical growth goes back to a spiritual growth in Ántonia" (p. 123). Giannone finds that "music becomes the metaphorical equivalent for Ántonia's greatness, her capacity for love and her inner spirit . . . her joie de vivre cannot be conveyed in words. It is more a rhythm than a reason. . . . Music in My Ántonia captures what is ineffable in the heroine: her warmth, naturalness, spontaneity, freedom, strength, and her haunting presence in the memory of those who knew her" (pp. 107-8).

⁵² Quoted from the Lincoln Sunday Star, Nov. 6, 1921 in Bennett, pp. 46-7.

⁵³ Sister Charles claims that the key to the structure of the novel is the Thanatos nature of Jim which he shares with Mr. Shimerda;

Mr. Shimerda's touch on Jim (p. 27) indicates his acceptance of Jim as a son, and Jim's mystic communion with Mr. Shimerda (pp. 101-2). Jim takes over the role of Mr. Shimerda and his relationship to her is not sexual. He deserts her also and thus shirks the "burden" of care given to him by her father (p. 101) which is taken up by Mrs. Stevens in Book IV (p. 103). The novel is "the inner story of Antonia's powerful, affirmative nature encircled by Jim's Thanatos character united with that of her father, which presents Antonia's life and love in the golden glow of the past, as a memory which is a reality" (p. 108). See also page 12 and note 23.

54 Giannone comments "the previously opposing values of divided worlds, Europe and America, are reconciled in the promise of Leo's success; and the old world's ideals and joys which are embodied in the musical instrument are preserved in Leo himself. . . . When Leo plays, it is as if cultural progress, held in check while the settlers contended with the tough, daily tasks, moves forward from where it left off" (p. 115). The violin represents the process of regeneration in America. Although Leo was born on Easter, this seems to have little importance in the novel.

55 Giannone stresses this episode as "the pulsating centre" of the novel occurring in the middle and giving off "the emotional--the musical--impulse which reverberates throughout" (p. 120). Through him Jim learns that "reason and logic. . . are less helpful at times than are emotions and intuitions. . . This sensitivity to the irrational and irreducible in man is requisite for Jim as the celebrator of Antonia" (p. 118). He is related to Antonia through a similarity of spirit for both are "intense and passionate, following something primal, almost primordial". His absolute pitch matches her absolute love and his memory, her power to bring together country and city, Europe and America (p. 121). He brings her to an understanding of herself (p. 119), suggests her blindness and foreshadows the tragedy it causes (p. 120). Altogether "The evaluative summation of Blind D'Arnault's life and musical accomplishment runs a parallel course to Antonia's life: from imitation to originality, from confinement to release, from excitement to expression, from frustration to self-expression" (p. 121). The sequence "holds special importance for an understanding of Antonia's magnificent capacity for life. . . . Through Jim's appreciation [it] enlarges into a metaphorical description of Antonia's inner nature, of the burning fire of life that warms her spirit, of the 'inner glow that never fades'" (p. 116). Apart from the fact that Antonia will never come to understand herself in the way in which Jim searches for himself, this seems to be rather overstating a comparatively simple incident which Cather remembered from her own youth and recorded as such in the novel. See the article "The Mystery of Blind Tom" by Ella Thornton, *Georgia Review*, XV, Winter, 1961, pp. 395-400.

⁵⁶ See Sergeant pp. 166-7, quoted p. 145.

⁵⁷ Giannone's remark "The events in Jim's memory which are most clearly linked to the lost happiness of boyhood are mostly musical" (p. 111) indicates that he is thinking largely of the Harling scenes of Book II although since he defines "musical" as including the sounds of nature, this is not necessarily so.

⁵⁸ Cather is contrasting the world of reality and the world of illusion in the theatre much as she is doing in "Paul's Case" where "The soloist chanced to be a German woman, by no means in her first youth, and the mother of many children; but she wore a satin gown and a tiara, and she had that indefinable air of achievement, that world-shine upon her, which blinded Paul to any possible defects" (Youth and the Bright Medusa, N.Y.: Knopf, 1961, p. 187).

⁵⁹ But see the comment of Curtis Dahl regarding the interpretation of this, note 21.

⁶⁰ See Martin's interpretation of this, note 37.

⁶¹ Randall notes that even Cather's most successful marriage brings the question of marriage in doubt (pp. 140-1).

⁶² My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 94.

⁶³ Bennett, p. 11.

⁶⁴ See also Bennett p. 11 for the source of this incident in Cather's own life.

⁶⁵ Giannone interprets this "hunger" as specifically musical: "his memory associates music with the effort to parry the bleakness of the outside world, to bring that world within man's jurisdiction--in short, to humanize it. . . . In a world which is largely a composite of deprivations, music becomes an important consolation, provided an occasion for camaradie, for a reassuring moment of community amid isolation and solitude" (p. 110).

⁶⁶ Although Cather frequently introduces Christmas into her novels, as in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Shadows on the Rock, The Song of the Lark, "Neighbour Rosicky", O Pioneers!, only in

The Shadows on the Rock does she again introduce it for its religious associations. Elsewhere it indicates the social family group, the exchange of gifts, the preparations and excitement and good food which accompany a pagan festivity. This is true even of Death Comes for the Archbishop. She rarely mentions Easter, and in My Antonia, although Leo stresses that he is born on Easter, it seems to have little significance.

CHAPTER 4: 'NEIGHBOUR ROSICKY'

¹ My Antonia, p. 18.

² The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf (1925) 1964, p. 265.

³ Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 43. E. K. Brown relates the inception of the story also to the death of Cather's father Charles Cather, who like Rosicky learned that he had angina in the winter and died in the spring of 1928. This perhaps explains the tone of reminiscence; in this story, says Brown, she "poured so much of what she felt about Charles Cather's life and death" (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. 275-6).

⁴ Randall finds the tone of "Neighbour Rosicky" tired and the landscape passive, and comments that it reveals Willa Cather's old age rather than Neighbour Rosicky's (The Landscape and the Looking Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 342, 344). It indicates her desire to escape from evil and its problems which she associates with the city, and thus it is both sentimental and nostalgic (p. 345). Yet Daiches finds that its sentimentality is counteracted by its elemental qualities and the earthiness, and that it reveals Cather's final adjustment to both nature and human relationships (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 106). And Brown comments favourably: "There is nothing simpler in Willa Cather's fiction than 'Neighbour Rosicky'; the tone is quietness itself, and perfectly sustained; the emotion has a flawless purity" (p. 276).

⁵ All page references in the text are from "Neighbour Rosicky" in Obscure Destinies, N.Y.: Knopf, 1960.

⁶ The suggestion for this incident may have come from Samuel McClure's autobiography which Cather actually wrote. One day McClure lost forty-five dollars which he pulled out of his pocket while mailing a letter: "When I reached home and told Mrs. McClure about it, we decided to have a good dinner and forget it. We had a saying in our flat that if you didn't mind a thing, it never really hurt you. We were never crushed or low in spirit. We never let our poverty make us mean. That is the greatest hurt that poverty can inflict upon people" (My Autobiography, N.Y.: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914, p. 174). Note that Cather has here related this incident carefully to the season and the country, and that she has given a detailed description of the food in keeping with her increasing concern for domestic detail (See pp. 46-8).

⁷ See note 4 above.

⁸ See Brown note 3 above for correspondence to Cather's father.

⁹ William Wordsworth, "A Spirit Did My Slumber Steal", ll. 7-8.

¹⁰ Shelley "Adonais":

He is made one with Nature; there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;

.
He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely. . . .

(Stanza 42, 43, 11)

(Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. K. N. Cameron, N. Y.: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1961, pp. 370-80). Yet Shelley means something rather different than Cather, since he has previously said: "He lives, he wakes--'tis Death is dead, not he;/Mourn not for Adonais" (Stanza 41).

¹¹ My *Ántonia*, p. 366. Brown notes that Cuzack and "Neighbour Rosicky" are both drawn from Annie Pavékla's husband (p. 275). See also Bennett, (*The World of Willa Cather*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 50). Bennett claims Annie's husband is the source of the anecdote on pp. 24-5: "Neighbours told him he should sell his cream, get more money, and buy more land, but he agreed with Annie . . . that roses in the cheeks of their children were more important than land or money in the bank" (p. 50).

¹² While Giannone examines these musical references in his *Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*, he does not draw this conclusion. He comments "Music calls to mind the past and youth", and "When Rosicky realizes just what he wants in life, his course is away from music and urban excitement toward a quiet life. Rosicky's death is described as total stillness. The peace is so 'complete and beautiful' because it fulfills perfectly a need of Rosicky's spirit" but he insists that this is not a period of "spiritual moribundity" (*Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 209-10). For a woman who has supposedly devoted her life to a love of music and culture, this is surely a striking departure!

¹³ Giannone says of the three stories of the volume: "Obscure Destinies is about eclipses and such things. Each of the three stories reveals a conjunction and a dispersion which characterizes the peculiar course of human affairs. Congenial people meet and move on swiftly--and independently--toward death, the eventuality that gives meaning to the passage leading to it. . . . Individual lives chart discrete paths, cross, continue hiddenly. It is the law of nature. The exceptional crossings are moments of love" (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, p. 207).

¹⁴ "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle" in Nation Sept. 5, 1923, pp. 237-8.

¹⁵ "Nebraska" p. 238.

¹⁶ "Nebraska" p. 238.

¹⁷ "Three American Singers" in McClure's Magazine XLII, No. 2, December, 1913, p. 42.

¹⁸ Kazin in On Native Grounds, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956, p. 184.

¹⁹ Daiches, p. 74.

PART II: THE ORDER OF ART

CHAPTER 5: INTRODUCTION

¹Journal March 1, 1896 in The Kingdom of Art, ed. Bernice Slote, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966, p. 417.

²Abrams compares the English Romantic era to the period between the two world wars for they followed the years of the French revolution, war and panic, and the social and political changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution. They too questioned the purpose of poetry. The first group retreated from the world like Flaubert for "la religion de beauty," claiming that the value of art was intrinsic as an end in itself; the second considered its moral and social effects, like Wordsworth who said in his Letters, "Every great poet is a teacher: I wish either to be considered a teacher, or as nothing", and Keats who called the poet "a sage, a humanist, physician to all men" (quoted M.E. Abrams, The Mirror and The Lamp, N.Y.: Norton, 1958, pp. 326-7, 329).

³Quoted in Toler, unpublished thesis, "Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather," University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 3.

⁴Quoted Abrams, pp. 27-8.

⁵Journal, Sept. 3, 1894 in The Kingdom of Art, p. 406. The downfall of Wilde and the aesthetic movement, Cather remarks is "the destruction of the most fatal and dangerous school of art that has ever voiced itself in the English tongue. . . . It is a peculiar fact that the aesthetic school which has from the beginning set out to seek what was most beautiful has ended by finding what was most grotesque, misshapen, and unlovely. Overwrought senses, like overwrought reason ends in madness, chaos and confusion" (Journal May 19, 1895 in The Kingdom of Art p. 390). Thus she rejects Pater's; "Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (Pater, The Renaissance: Studies

in Art and Poetry, London, Macmillan, 1907, p. 238) with Wilde's "All art is quite useless" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, N.Y.: New American Library, Signet, 1962, Preface).

⁶Quoted in Curtin, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," The University of Wisconsin, 1959, pp. 121-2.

⁷Browning, "Fra Lippo Lippi, ll. 300-305, Selected Poetry, N.Y.: Rinehart & Co., 1956, p. 90.

⁸On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, pp. 20-1.

⁹Collingwood, The Principles of Art, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Books, 1958, p. 118. He says elsewhere that art must be prophetic. The artist must tell the secrets of the community and reveal to it the corruption of its own consciousness. His remedy is the work of art, the revelation (p. 336).

¹⁰Collingwood, p. 291.

¹¹Collingwood, p. 303.

¹²Mumford, Art and Technics, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1960, p. 16.

¹³Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1964, p. 11.

¹⁴"The Novel D  meubl  " in Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 48.

¹⁵The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 378. Ellen Glasgow claimed that "The chief end of the novel, as indeed of all literature, I felt, was to increase our understanding of life and heighten our consciousness. To do this, writing must not only render experience, it must interpret and intensify the daily processes of living," A Certain Measure, N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, 1943, p. 30. And James in The Art of Fiction said we must ask of fiction "Is it valid, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some impression or perception of life?"; there should be a "perfect dependency of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it" (The Future of the Novel, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1956, p. 49).

¹⁶"Preface to Lyrical Ballads," p. 25.

¹⁷M. E. Chase, "Five Literary Portraits", Massachusetts Review, III, 1961-2, p. 512. See also Cather's remark "[My Antonia is] just the other side of the rug, the pattern that is not supposed to count in a story. In it there is no love affair, no courtship, no marriage, no broken heart, no struggle for success. I knew I'd ruin my material if I put it in the usual fictional pattern. I just used it the way I thought absolutely true" (in New York World, April 19, 1925, quoted in Bennett, p. 210).

¹⁸See Bennett, "In Miss Cather's stories, the characters and emotions predominate"; she quotes Cather's comment on A Lost Lady, "All the lovely emotions that one has had some day appear with bodies, and it isn't as if one found ideas suddenly. Before this the memories of these experiences and emotions have been like a perfume", Bennett, p. 211.

¹⁹On Writing, pp. 123-4.

²⁰On Writing, pp. 124-5.

²¹See On Writing, pp. 108-10.

²²On Writing, pp. 49-50.

²³On Writing, pp. 41-2.

²⁴On Writing, pp. 38.

²⁵On Writing, pp. 39-40. Coleridge suggests that it is the "poet's power to animate and humanize nature by fusing his own life and passion with those objects of sense which as objects, 'are essentially fixed and dead' . . . by impressing the stamp and humanity of human feeling, over inanimate objects. . . a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit" (Quoted from Shakespearean Criticism I, 212-3, Biographia II, 16-18 by Abrams, p. 292-3.

²⁶February 27, 1818; in Selected Letters of John Keats, Lionel Trilling, ed., New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951.

²⁷Alexander's Bridge, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1962, vii.

²⁸Quoted in Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 116. See also Meredith's definition of genius in McClure's Autobiography which Cather wrote:

"It is an extraordinary activity of mind in which all conscious and subconscious knowledge mass themselves without any effort of the will and become effective. It manifests itself in three ways--in producing, in organizing, and in rapidity of thought" (p. 232).

²⁹ Quoted in Beebe from Jocelyn Baines Biography of Joseph Conrad, p. 9.

³⁰ Lewis, Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953. She also observes, "I think she never changed her fundamental design of a book, except in the case of O Pioneers!. In all her other novels the idea came to her as a whole, the end as well as the beginning, and writing the novel was simply an attempt to realize her vision of it" (pp. 121-2).

³¹ Quoted Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather," American Literature X, 1938-9, pp. 138-9.

³² Not Under Forty, pp. 45, 42. See Canby's comment: "She said her tradition of art was French from Flaubert. She liked to analyze 'what constituted perfection for a given situation or theme. . . . Her idea was that the consummate artist in fiction gave himself up entirely to the situation he chose for his story, following its nuances, not shaping it to preconceived effects' ('Willa Cather', Saturday Review of Literature, May 10, 1947, p. 22. Cather herself had this "style" in her everyday speech. Lewis records "Whatever she said had an evocative quality--a quality of creating much more than her words actually stated, of summoning up images, suggestions, overtones and undertones of feeling that opened long vistas to one's imagination. Her talk was sometimes more brilliant than her writing; for it had the freer quality of improvisation. Thought and language seemed simultaneous with her" (xvi).

³³ Sergeant, p. 203.

³⁴ Sergeant, p. 203. This is true even of her choice of subject, as indicated by her adoption of Sarah Orne Jewett's phrase: "The thing that teases the mind over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper--whether little or great, it belongs to literature" (Not Under Forty, p. 76).

³⁵ Sergeant, pp. 108-9.

³⁶ William Frost, ed. Romantic and Victorian Poetry, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962, 2nd ed., p. 22.

³⁷ Abrams, p. 103.

³⁸ Quoted in Abrams, pp. 102-3.

³⁹ Sergeant, p. 48, also 111, and Bennett, pp. 169-70.

⁴⁰ Lincoln Courier, Oct. 26, 1895 in The Kingdom of Art, p. 149.

⁴¹ Quoted in Brown, p. 67.

⁴² James, "The Art of Fiction," in The Future of the Novel, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1956, pp. 20-21.

⁴³ Kingdom of Art, p. 407.

⁴⁴ The Song of the Lark, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Quoted Curtin, p. 135. But see Kouewenhoven, Made in America, who claims that technological arts reveal "more clearly on the whole than the arts of any other people, the nature and meaning of modern civilization" (N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962, pp. 4-5). The creativity of the United States is revealed most clearly in tools and machines with their "complete absence of ornamentation." After the United States Exhibition of 1876 at Philadelphia, the London Times admired their designs for economy, rapid performance, constraint and simplicity (pp. 16, 18-20), and observed "The American mechanizes as an old Greek sculptured, as the Venetian painted" (p. 25). And the Atlantic Monthly comments, "Surely here, and not in literature, science or art, is the true evidence of man's creative power; here is Prometheus Unbound"; "The American people had developed skills and knowledge which enabled them to create patterns of clean, organic, and indigneous beauty out of the crude materials of the technological environment" (p. 25). Kouewenhoven claims that America was cut off from the humane tradition of Europe and was free to adapt new forms but the imitative architecture was academic and impotent, as evidenced in pseudo-classical and pseudo-Renaissance public buildings; the real architecture of America, direct, simple, and with form adapted to function, was revealed in grain elevators, warehouses and factories (p. 67). But Cather had no sympathy for technological art and preferred the old humane traditions of Europe even when these were alien to the New

World environment as in the French architecture of the Cathedral in Death Comes for the Archbishop which destroyed the local Spanish art (See Mary Austin's comment in Sergeant, p. 235).

46 Sergeant, p. 45.

47 Sergeant, p. 145.

48 Journal, August 11, 1895, in The Kingdom of Art, p. 195.

49 Journal, Oct. 28, 1894, The Kingdom of Art, p. 179. See also her comments on "the prevalence of a superficial culture": "The women who run about from one culture club to another studying Italian art out of a textbook and an encyclopedia and believing that they are learning something about it by memorizing a string of facts, are fatal to the spirit of art. The Negro boy who plays by ear on his fiddle airs from 'Traviata' without knowing what he is playing, or why he likes it, has more real understanding of Italian art than these esthetic creatures" (quoted Bennett p. 148).

50 Journal Jan. 12, 1896 in The Kingdom of Art, p. 188.

51 The Song of the Lark, p. 328.

52 Journal, October 7, 1894 in The Kingdom of Art, p. 177. An indication of the cultural level of the West in Cather's day might be given by Garland's comment that he found on a patent medicine cart "the highest qualities of musical art that I had hitherto known" (Son of the Middle Border, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1962, p. 203).

53 A Lost Lady, N.Y.: Knopf, 1963, p. 159. See also My Antonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961, pp. 201, 212.

54 Beebe, p. 39.

55 Bennett, pp. 151-2.

56 On Writing, p. 125.

57 On Writing, p. 126.

58 Leon Edel, "The Paradox of Success" in Schroeter ed. Willa Cather and Her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 262-3.

- 59 The Song of the Lark, p. 378.
- 60 "Escapism" in On Writing, p. 19.
- 61 The Song of the Lark, pp. 379-80.
- 62 Matthew Arnold, "Literature and Science" in Matthew Arnold
ed. Lionel Trilling, N.Y.: The Viking Press, 1960, p. 428.
- 63 Bennett, p. 168.
- 64 Quoted Curtin, pp. 21-2.
- 65 On Writing, p. 49.
- 66 On Writing, p. 55.
- 67 The Song of the Lark, v.
- 68 Quoted in Bennett, p. 165.
- 69 Not Under Forty, pp. 48-9.
- 70 The Song of the Lark, p. 378.
- 71 Collingwood defines art or craft as "the power to produce
a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and directed
action" (p. 15).
- 72 Quoted Bennett, pp. 167-8 from Lincoln Sunday Star, Nov.
6, 1921.
- 73 Quoted in Abrams, p. 154; see note 105.
- 74 Sergeant, p. 197.
- 75 Quoted Curtin, p. 21, from "Training for the Ballet",
McClure's Magazine, October 1913.
- 76 The Song of the Lark, p. 554.

77 The Song of the Lark, p. 251.

78 Lewis, p. 47.

79 Richard Giannone, Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1968, pp. 5-6.

80 Abrams, p. 105.

81 Quoted Abrams, pp. 79-80.

82 Quoted Abrams, pp. 81-2.

83 Abrams, p. 82.

84 Abrams, pp. 82-3.

85 Abrams, pp. 83-4.

86 Huxley, "On Handicrafts" in On Art and Artists, Morris Philipson, ed., Cleveland: World Publishing Company, Meridian Books, 1965, p. 88.

87 Huxley, pp. 88-9. Huxley refers to Indian crafts: "poetry, sarape, weaving, leatherwork, the ornamental plaiting of string," some of which are excellent, and most "dull and sometimes downright ugly." Peasant art attracts, he claims, because of its security from rise and fall, the alternating starvation and boredom of a machine society, and it provides serenity and satisfaction in its craftsmanship. He explains, however, that it is not vulgar for vulgarity is the by-product of success, the use of good techniques by bad artists, and the demands of society for art which exceeds the supply of competent men. The peasants have a good tradition which enables them to produce good work despite a lack of imagination (pp. 88-91).

88 On Writing, p. 19.

89 The Song of the Lark, p. 123.

90 On Writing, pp. 5-6.

91 Quoted in Bennett, p. 147.

92 New York World, April 19, 1925, quoted Bennett, p. 150.

93 "Nebraska", Nation, Sept. 5, 1923, p. 238.

94 Quoted Brown, p. 227.

95 Chicago Poems.

96 The Song of the Lark, p. 292.

97 The Song of the Lark, pp. 293-4.

98 The Song of the Lark, pp. 54, 57.

99 Yet when Mable Luhan, wife of Tony, a descendent of the Pueblos, urged her to join the movement to defeat the politicians trying to destroy Indian lands and ceremonies, she had no success for Cather was uninterested in tribal rites or ceremonies. Once when Sergeant lent her a story of two white boys at an Indian ceremonial, she returned it: "Don't you remember I am not interested in this sort of thing?" (Sergeant, p. 206-7).

100 Willa Cather in Europe, N.Y.: Knopf, 1956, pp. 61-2.

101 Geismar would not agree: "It is no mean feat, incidentally, to choose an opera singer for one's heroine, as she does in the case of Thea Kronberg, and to establish an artist's love for music as the central passion of a novel"; Cather "deserves the wide popular recognition it brought to her work as a whole" for it is "big" not only in size but content" (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, pp. 166-7. But see Randall who objects that the last three hundred pages state rather than show the artist at work: "Her greatness is never shown but talked about ad nauseam"--and it indicates "a failure of moral vision" for her heroine renounces the whole world only to get it back, and with it, her freedom (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge, Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 46-7, 50). For an interesting example of the development of a singer in fiction, see Robertson Davies' A Mixture of Frailties.

102 H. M. Jones in The Bright Medusa notes the difference in approach to the artist of James and Cather: "[James'] narratives do concern the sculptor, the painter, the actress, and the writer. But there is a radical difference between the approach. . . . For James the problem is one of culture; for Miss Cather it is a problem of

energy. The one pays homage to Apollo, the other to Dionysius, and though both agree that the artist is possessed of a secret and superior truth, for James the problem is Platonic, whereas Miss Cather narrates the unfolding of her singer in terms of Orphic initiation. Culture, it is James' hope, will eventually lead into that study of perfection which is art; but in Miss Cather's world the initiates already recognize each other by signs too subtle for the multitude. Art for the one is wisdom; for the other it is radiance (in Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 248).

103 Quoted in Bennett, p. 165.

104 The Song of the Lark, p. 95.

105 The Song of the Lark, pp. 98-9.

106 State Journal, quoted Brown, p. 69.

107 Quoted in Bennett, 'Willa Cather in Pittsburgh,' Prairie Schooner XXXIII Spring, 1959, pp. 64-76.

108 On Writing, pp. 102-3. In "The Novel D meubl " she quotes M rim e's essay on Gogol: "L'art de choisir parmi les innom rables traits que nous offre la nature est, apr s tout, bien plus difficile que celui des observer avec attention et de les rendre avec exactitude" (Not Under Forty, p. 45). She admired M rim e as "that caustic, that arrogant Frenchman from whose economical prose not one line could be cut" (Sergeant, p. 49).

109 The Song of the Lark, p. 511.

110 The Song of the Lark, p. 571.

111 On Writing, p. 107-8.

112 Quoted from "The Namesake," 1907, in Sergeant, p. 277.

113 See Randall who claims that A Lost Lady, One of Ours, The Professor's House and My Mortal Enemy concern the problem of "how to lead the comely life in the modern world" (p. 174).

114 Sergeant, p. 51.

115 Trilling, "Willa Cather" in After the Genteel Tradition,
N.Y.: Viking Press, 1964, pp. 54-5.

116 Not Under Forty, pp. 63-5.

117 Not Under Forty, p. 71.

118 Not Under Forty, p. 67.

119 Not Under Forty, p. 58.

120 Not Under Forty, p. 61.

121 Not Under Forty, p. 63.

122 Not Under Forty, p. 73.

123 Not Under Forty, p. 75.

124 Quoted Bennett, pp. 169-70.

125 Quoted Bennett, p. 167.

126 Bennett, p. 167.

127 O Pioneers!, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition,
1962, pp. 29-30.

128 My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition,
1961, p. 180.

129 "Neighbour Rosicky" in Obscure Destinies, N.Y.: Knopf,
1960, p. 53.

130 The Song of the Lark, p. 528.

131 See note 75 below, and discussion p. 226.

132 One of Ours, N.Y.: Knopf, 1965, p. 43.

133 Sergeant, p. 45.

- 134 Sergeant, p. 187.
- 135 A Lost Lady, pp. 118-9.
- 136 A Lost Lady, p. 160.
- 137 A Lost Lady, p. 162.
- 138 A Lost Lady, p. 168.
- 139 The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf 1964, p. 102.
- 140 The Professor's House, p. 176.
- 141 The Professor's House, pp. 134, 142.
- 142 The Professor's House, p. 160.
- 143 The Professor's House, pp. 26-7.
- 144 The Professor's House, p. 11. But see Cather's comment on houses, p. 205-16.
- 145 The Professor's House, p. 33.
- 146 The Kingdom of Art, p. 195; see page 194.
- 147 Trilling, pp. 54-5.
- 148 Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 39.
- 149 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 40.
- 150 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 227, 21.
- 151 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 177.
- 152 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 30-2.
- 153 Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 16-7.

- 154 "On Shadows on the Rock," On Writing, p. 16.
- 155 Shadows on the Rock, p. 23.
- 156 Shadows on the Rock, pp. 24-5.
- 157 Shadows on the Rock, pp. 197-8.
- 158 See Trilling, p. 56. He says of Lucy Gayheart: "the novel has been *démeublé* indeed; but life without its furniture is strangely bare"; the reference is to Cather's comment in "The Novel *Démeublé*": "The elder Dumas enunciated a great principle when he said that to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls" (Not Under Forty, p. 51). See also Randall, p. 310 .
- 159 Bennett, p. 167.
- 160 Toler, unpublished thesis, p. 522.
- 161 Toler, pp. 503-5.
- 162 Schmittlein, unpublished thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1962, p. 58.
- 163 Beebe, Preface, p. 5.
- 164 Beebe, p. 105.
- 165 See Sergeant, pp. 131-2.
- 166 Beebe, p. 6.
- 167 The Song of the Lark, p. 559.
- 168 Brynner, "A Willa Cather Triptych," New Mexico Quarterly XXIII, 1953, pp. 333-4.
- 169 Forster, Aspects of the Novel, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1962, p. 34.
- 170 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 245.

- 171 Beebe, p. 5.
- 172 Beebe, pp. 16-7.
- 173 Beebe, p. 97.
- 174 See discussion pp. 193-5.
- 175 Journal, Sept. 23, 1894, Kingdom of Art, p. 407.
- 176 Journal, March 1, 1896, Kingdom of Art, p. 417.
- 177 Bloom, E. A. and L. D. Bloom, The Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, Arcterus Books, 1964, p. 148. See also Toler: "[Cather's early artist] like his European cousins, was ridden by a genius that was of mysteriously divine origin. He went through a period of self-discovery, and was motivated toward an esthetic ideal. He had to refuse compromise with Philistine demands, remain aloof from society, and take chances with new, untried things. He lived outside the realm of conventionality in customs and morals and was bound by no law; because of this he was isolated and misunderstood, was essentially a tragic figure. Society considered him mad or irresponsible" (unpublished thesis, Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather, University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 26).
- 178 On Writing, p. 24.
- 179 Quoted in Schorer, The World We Imagine, N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968, p. 394.
- 180 On Writing, p. 51.
- 181 The Song of the Lark, p. 533.
- 182 The Song of the Lark, p. 550.
- 183 The Song of the Lark, p. vi.
- 184 Bloom, p. 139. Yet Bloom does recognize that Cather's artists have human failings, that they are incomplete as individuals and socially maladjusted and he claims that Cather herself was aware of this (p. 138).

- 185 Not Under Forty, p. 73.
- 186 Not Under Forty, pp. 72-3.
- 187 Journal, Feb. 11, 1894, quoted Toler, p. 26.
- 188 Sergeant, p. 261.
- 189 "Three American Singers", McClure's Magazine, XLII, No. 2, December, 1913, p. 42.
- 190 Not Under Forty, p. 80.
- 191 On Writing, pp. 18-9.
- 192 See Sergeant, p. 197.
- 193 On Writing, p. 21.
- 194 On Writing, p. 24.
- 195 On Writing, p. 202.
- 196 Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Preface.
- 197 On Writing, p. 22.
- 198 See discussion pp. 29-30.
- 199 Sergeant, p. 197.
- 200 My 'Antonia, p. 272.
- 201 "Paul's Case" in Youth and the Bright Medusa, N.Y.: Knopf, 1961, pp. 195-6.
- 202 "Paul's Case", p. 187.
- 203 The Song of the Lark, p. vi.

204 The Song of the Lark, p. vi.

205 The Professor's House, pp. 68-9.

206 The Professor's House, p. 161.

207 The Professor's House, pp. 271-2.

208 The Professor's House, p. 283.

209 Sergeant, p. 238. But compare Conrad's remarks upon finishing *Nostromo*; he asked friends to congratulate him "as upon recovery from a dangerous illness"; "the intimacy and the strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle. . . [is comparable to] the westward winter passage round Cape Horn." And Virginia Woolf writing *The Years*: "Few people can be so tortured by writing as I am. Only Flaubert I think . . . I think I can bring it off, if only I have courage and patience: take each scene quietly: compose: I think it may be a good book . . . I feel I don't care so long as I'm rid of it (Quoted in Schorer, p. 394).

210 See Carl Van Doren: "pioneers and artists, in Miss Cather's understanding, are practically equal in single-mindedness; at least they work much by themselves, contending with definite though ruthless obstacles and looking forward, if they win, to a freedom which cannot be achieved in the routine of crowded communities (Contemporary American Novelists, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1922, pp. 115-6). Bloom too notes that the artist "like the pioneer, undergoes the crises of self-discovery, struggle and ultimate spiritual triumph"; he is "a pilgrim of the imagination" with a sanctity of purpose, and he shares with the pioneer and the priest a private individual spirit which is the "unique heritage of all creative people" (Bloom, pp. 116-7, 138).

211 Trilling, After the Genteel Tradition, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1964, pp. 56-7.

212 Edel in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 258.

CHAPTER 6: Alexander's Bridge

¹ Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 182.

² Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, N.Y.: New American Library, Signet, 1962, p. 226. There has been some discussion on the theme of Alexander's Bridge. Toler suggests that it is simply man's attempt to deal with youth; Alexander is neither an artist, a pioneer or a historical figure and he has no motivating spirit in art or the land; his success is material and he lacks dedication (unpublished thesis, "Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather," University of Notre Dame, 1965, pp. 80-4). Brown finds it in "a process within a person" like My Mortal Enemy (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 160), and Giamone likewise "The psychological donnée of the novel is the partition of the self; the action a romantic search. Both features are expansions of a dualistic view of man . . . which deepens into a determinant of Willa Cather's mature art"; Alexander suffers from a psychic division between what he is and what he ought to be" (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, p. 60). Randall suggests that the novel concerns a conflict between two concepts, "the code of society and self-development," between the super-man ideal and the traditional concept of social responsibility" (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 40). Sister Charles finds it in the conflict of love and death, Eros and Thanatos, for the soul of Alexander. The ambiguity is not resolved in the end, although Alexander does relinquish Eros and the eternal appeal of youth for Thanatos (unpublished thesis, "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Notre Dame, 1965, pp. 16-20, 27).

³ All page references in the text are to Alexander's Bridge, N.Y.: Bantam Books by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

⁴ Alexander's Bridge has not received much critical attention, and is on the whole underestimated, discounted as an expression of themes which Cather will later abandon as she herself has said. Hinz calls it poor; it is "reporting, not art" ("The Real Alexander's Bridge," American Literature XXI, 1950, p. 476), although he suggests it bears similarities to Ibsen's Master-Builders (p. 473). Wallace Stegner remarked that "Alexander's Bridge was a nearly total mistake--a novel laid in London and dealing with the attenuated characters and fragile ethical problems of the genteel tradition" (The American Novel, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1965, p. 144). Randall comments that the vision is "adolescent," that it indicates a failure

in both moral vision and structure as well as the theme of society versus the individual, and that Cather demonstrates "her own fear of human emotions" (pp. 40-1), and Curtin that there is no moral choice; the process of aging is inevitable, determined by age and fate, and that it suggests a belief in life as capricious and terrible: "The good and evil are in terms of energy, natural force" (unpublished thesis "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Wisconsin, 1959, pp. 45-6). Even Daiches who comments on the assurance, adroitness and control of dialogue, finds the central emotional situations never fully realized, and suggests that Cather is exploring the central character along with the reader. The resolution is unreal, "a solution by fictional artifice of what has not been solved by the life generated in the novel itself" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 16, 17).

⁵ For example see Daiches, note 4 above, Randall, p. 41.

⁶ Cather is making use here of a historic incident, the collapse of a real bridge August 30, 1907. The detail is similar but Cather combines the chief engineer Burke and the consulting engineer Theodore Cooper. For a full discussion of this see Hinz, pp. 473-6.

⁷ Daiches comments that Wilson is used as a vantage point to observe at beginning and end but not utilized fully throughout the story, and the main action occurs without intervention; the perspective is not clear (p. 17). Curtin remarks that he is employed in the manner of a Greek chorus rather than a point-of-view character, an objective angle to balance the subjective elements of Alexander's psychology (pp. 45-6).

⁸ Curtin comments that the bridge unites the themes of "energy, death, the future and society," and connects London and Boston through a common symbol (p. 50). Charles suggests it connects the geographic and psychic worlds of the novel (p. 26), and Giannone claims that its psychological counterpart in the dramatic pattern is music which reflects all of Alexander's happy moments and which forms a bridge to the intensity of his youth and therefore his soul (pp. 65-6). Like the physical bridge, the musical bridge breaks after Chapter VIII and at the end the characters are left to "create for themselves a musical bridge to Alexander's life" (p. 67).

⁹ See for example The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, pp. 240, 243.

¹⁰ Geismar suggests that Alexander is almost the only interesting man in Cather's early period; it is ironic that he should be brought to his death by the strangle-hold of the common masses (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, pp. 157-8).

¹¹ Giannone points out that Winnifred has created for him a sanctuary. She has studied in Vienna and her playing of Schumann is significant for his wife was a brilliant pianist who "subordinated her talent for the sake of her husband's higher genius." Her music is classical, "brilliant, passionate and finished" but Alexander's need is deeper and more elemental (pp. 61-2).

¹² Note the similarity to the Professor's wife, The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 50, 81.

¹³ Giannone suggests that in contrast to Winnifred's music, Hilda's is impulsive, simple and direct, indicating her warmth and openness; while Alexander is passive to Winnifred's playing, he responds vividly to Hilda's singing, yet the music is an ineffective denial of the passion each feels and the harp suggests the brevity and fatality of their love (pp. 63-4).

¹⁴ Charles notes the conflict of Alexander's Eros nature with Thanatos in the British Museum; in later life, he gives in to Thanatos (pp. 16-20, 27).

¹⁵ Geismar comments that Alexander has missed youth and seeks in love the return of his own identity; in finding it, he destroys the pattern of the present: "full consciousness of self, as it reaches its point of tension, touches the orbit of death" (p. 158).

¹⁶ Randall connects Hilda with Alexander's art so that the struggle within him is between life and creativity; "when he is unable to come to terms with passionate love, his creativity destroys him", Randall adds that here the struggle is allegorical and that Cather admits that ultimately it is irresolvable, although later she will present her protagonists as above conflict and always right (p. 42).

¹⁷ See Sister Charles comment on the theme of Eros versus Thanatos in the novel which she develops from this passage, note 2 above.

CHAPTER 7: The Song of the Lark

¹ All page references in the text are taken from The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin by the Riverside Press, Sentry Edition, rev. 1937, 1963.

² Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 132-3.

³ Sergeant, p. 137.⁴ Critical response to the novel varies but there has been less treatment of The Song of the Lark than of any of Cather's other long novels. Geismar remarks that "it is no mean feat, incidentally, to choose an opera singer for one's heroine . . . and to establish an artist's love for music as the central passion of a novel", and remarks that "in terms of its content as well as its actual size . . . it is the 'big' book of Cather's first period, and it deserves the wide popular recognition it brought to her work as a whole" (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 166-7). Sherman calls it "near the top notch of American fiction. It seems to me one of the truest and profoundest studies of the mind and heart of a great artist ever written anywhere. It is a magnificent piece of imaginative realism. It is also, I believe, Miss Cather's most intimate book (in Critical Woodcuts, N.Y.: Scribner's, 1926, p. 43). And Daiches observes, "[it is] full of impressive insights into the life of the musical artist and shows a wealth of musical intelligence adroitly put at the service of character study" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 35). It has "equal power and even greater richness" than O Pioneers! and examines "the fierce concentration on the processes by which an artist finds herself. . . the development of the heroine's potentialities under the impact both of circumstances and the drive of her own character . . . [and] the shrewd understanding of the conflict between those characters whose perception and ambitions are limited by the conventions of provincial complacency and those who instinctively feel the need to escape from such limitations" (p. 28).

Yet Brown comments; "it seems curious that the novel in which Willa Cather is most explicitly engaged with artists and the artistic process is the least artistic of her works", and she later cut over one tenth of it, wishing that she had used the same austerity in her choice of language as she claimed Fremstad had (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 189), and Curtin remarks that the novel is a "positive expression" of her decline of energy which now becomes "desire, inexplicable, irrational" (unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Wisconsin, 1959, pp. 87-8). Randall suggests that it indicates a complete "failure of moral vision" where the heroine renounces the world only to get it back; she has complete freedom. He suggests that Cather has only two attitudes to art,

complete acceptance or total rejection, the latter dismissed as "stupid faces." The choice, he objects, is too easy, and the novel substitutes art for human relationships or ties, whether sexual, domestic or maternal (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 50, 44-5).

⁵ Sergeant, p. 134-7.

⁶ But see Giannone: "She shifts the point of view to Archie and defines Thea through a series of musical personages. . . . The limited vision of Archie preserves the 'admiration and estrangement' of the non-artist before creative genius" and he finds the title "Kronberg" fitting in its coldness, detachment and intimidation for ordinary mortals (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 96-7).

⁷ Brown, pp. 188-9.

⁸ Van Ghent, Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, pp. 18-9. She calls it "a ponderous bulky novel that suffers from autobiographic compulsion" (p. 18).

⁹ Randall, pp. 46-7.

¹⁰ We meet Fred on page 334 and are told he is married on page 413. See William Curtin, p. 98.

¹¹ E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books (1927) 1962, p. 34.

¹² See "My First Novels" in On Writing, p. 96.

¹³ Lambert, unpublished thesis, "Theme and Craftsmanship in Willa Cather's Novels", University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1964, p. 251.

¹⁴ Lambert, pp. 190-2. Daiches notes that after Part I, the novel becomes more and more purely documentary and loses much of its interest, although it is skilful in the alternation of moods and the interaction of characters and environment. The section of the Cliff-Dwellers is well-done but not integrated into the development and the

Epilogue, the return to Moonstone "to explore the meaning of the relation between those who go out into the world and make a name for themselves and the routine lives of those who stay at home," is clever but has "little relation to the main theme of the novel so that it seems to end on an afterthought," pp. 32-5.

¹⁵ See also pp. 564-5.

¹⁶ Daiches comments on the use of deus ex machina and claims that the technique is legitimate in a novel of this kind "but this does not absolve the novelist from the responsibility of making the characters who play this liberating part operate on the same level of probability as the main action" (p. 30). He finds Dr. Archie and Fred both "conventional romantic characters who exist in order to help the heroine along", but Ray Kennedy he claims to be drawn "with more conviction"; if she had been content with Moonstone, he would be the best that she could hope for, and that she uses his money to escape symbolizes her relationship to this environment (p. 30).

¹⁷ Sergeant, p. 282.

¹⁸ William Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud."

¹⁹ For Cather's own reaction to the prairies see Sergeant, pp. 49, 79, quoted on pages 34, 40-41.

²⁰ For a similar description of the Southwest, see Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 274-6.

²¹ It is similar to the tales of Father Hector and Noel Chabanel in Shadows on the Rock although these are closely related to the narrative.

²² Sergeant, p. 123.

²³ Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1964, p. 11.

²⁴ Sergeant, p. 98.

²⁵ "Three American Singers," McClure's Magazine XLII No. 2, December, 1913, p. 48.

²⁶ Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1964, pp. 16-17, 97. See discussion p. 230.

27 "Three American Singers," pp. 33-4.

28 "Three American Singers," p. 36.

29 See Farrar's remark: "People are often shocked because when I sing in concert I don't wear gloves. I can't sing if I can feel my clothes, I don't wear stays, and I would like to sing without any clothes if I could. . . . I sing with my body, and the freer it is, the better I can sing" (Three American Singers, p. 38).

30 See also p. 267.

31 "Three American Singers," pp. 37-8.

32 Adams claims that she is ruthless, and contrasts the mature artist with Antonia who emerges at the end "battered and enlarged" while Thea "glitters, spiritually smaller" (unpublished thesis, "Six Novels of Willa Cather", Ohio State University, 1961, pp. 109-11).

33 Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 73.

34 "To Willa Cather none of this mattered. . . . Artistic achievement means a constant bleeding of a person's strength. Imaginative understanding of the artistic process should bring, she thought, a deep compassion for what the personality of the artist undergoes, if not homage for his acceptance of his destiny". And Brown adds "In The Song of the Lark Willa Cather brought together the imaginative understanding, the deep compassion, and the homage," (p. 187).

35 "Three American Singers," p. 42.

36 "Three American Singers," p. 42.

37 "Three American Singers," p. 43.

38 Geismar points out that Thea reveals "an element of arrogance, or of a rather complacent provincial ignorance of her own. The material conveniences, the trappings of luxury with which Cather's heroine is surrounded at the end: the fur coat which she leaves for her maid to pick up, the instructions she transmits to her assistant, Mr. Landry, to have tea at five, the cab which is always waiting at her door, the intimate little dinners, or the

delicate underclothing which, to her annoyance, has been misplaced by some worthless hotel 'nigger'--is all this a sort of compensation for the travail of an artist in a society of so many material conveniences"? (pp. 169-70).

³⁹ Curtin observes "Nature itself is the source of the energy, the power, the ardor, the passion which is at the heart of desire (p. 94).

⁴⁰ See her article on Farrar's voice: "Its chief beauty is in its colouring, in the admirable way in which it takes on the hue of feeling and expresses shades of emotion. Her voice is supple and elastic, like her body. . . . It often seems to be not so much vocalization as a kind of feeling which manifests itself in sound" ("Three American Singers," p. 39). She declares "she loves the sensuous rather than the intellectual side of her work; that music is a short cut to emotion. . . . She loves warmth and color, the excitement that attends a stimulated imagination, the releasing of these things in her voice and face" (p. 41).

⁴¹ Howard Mumford Jones observes "One notes the assumption that there exists a secret community of persons capable of discovering and accepting instinctive values--a mystery cult of art, a fraternity of the initiate. . . against the Philistines" (from The Bright Medusa, in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 241).

⁴² Curtin notes the use of bird imagery, the swallows timid and the eagles like Thea, courageous; they reflect "the conflict between sexual domesticity and creative art" (p. 101).

⁴³ Giannone points out that his name means "desire"; in him "desire outweighs discipline" and therefore he is emotionally frustrated, identifying himself with Orpheus and his loss of music with the loss of Eurydice (pp. 88-9). Randall claims that Wunsch is a failure, not a success in spite of will, indicating that Cather had a more complex view of success and failure than her avowals indicate (p. 46). But Wunsch does not have the will to overcome obstacles, to discipline the self, which Thea has. Giannone is more accurate here. Bennett indicates that Wunsch was patterned on Cather's own teacher Professor Shindelmeisser in *Red Cloud* whose background was similar to Wunsch's (pp. 152-4).

⁴⁴ Geismar points out she finds a refuge among the Mexicans from alienation at home and her singing expresses "the ecstasy and anguish of a whole race of aliens" (pp. 166-7). Jacks notes the virtues of the Moonstone Mexicans which they share with the people

of New Mexico: "thrift, kindness, industry, charity. . . . accomplishment, satisfaction in living; generosity, even genius" as well as the love of beauty, the awareness of pleasure and of the immanence of death ("Willa Cather and the Southwest", New Mexico Quarterly, XXVII 1956, pp. 83-7).

⁴⁵ Geismar asks "is a mere glimpse of the great Sieglinde, and Thea's gracious bow, quite sufficient to bring happiness to her old friend, Spanish Johnny?", noting that it is "a curious resolution to the tale of an immigrant girl" (p. 170).

⁴⁶ Giannone observes that while Thea requires discipline, yet "discipline checks at the same time that it cleanses. . . . The old inspiration is replaced by empty routine" until she is released by the Cliff-Dwellers (p. 93). Randall suggests that these two views of art as desire (which he calls "spontaneity") and as expression of discipline are not reconciled in the novel and art becomes "a projection of the artist's personality" (p. 47).

⁴⁷ Sister Charles notes the death-rebirth imagery of this section; at the close of Part III Fred becomes her tomb and also her womb, for he sends her to the Canyon where "in this return to the womb-tomb of time, Thea strips herself of all non-essentials, and prepares for her rebirth as an artist" (unpublished thesis, "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Notre Dame, 1965, pp. 66-8).

⁴⁸ Schmittlein defines as "sympatico" those who are sympathetic to art but lack the emotional, intellectual or creative ability of the artist (unpublished thesis, "Willa Cather's Novels: An Evolving Art", University of Pittsburgh, 1962, p. 58). See discussion p. 232

⁴⁹ See Giannone's comment, quoted note 6 above.

⁵⁰ Dr. Archie, Bennett notes, was patterned after Dr. McKeeby in Red Cloud who was a type of "father" to her as Dr. Archie is to Thea (see p. 438) (Bennett, pp. 110, 114.)

⁵¹ Geismar believes that Fred's comment--"he asked himself whether, between men and women, all ways were not more or less crooked. He believed those which are called straight were the most dangerous of all He would deceive her not once, he told himself, fiercely, but a hundred times, to keep her free" (p. 424)--indicates "the spaciousness of Cather's views of human relationships";

Harsanyi "tells the truth to Thea in order to make her free," and Fred Ottenburg "deceives her in order to keep her free" (p. 168). Yet Daiches suggests more simply; "Fred must be around to help, but he cannot be allowed to clutter up Thea's emotional life, so he is manipulated around her with a delicately artificial pirouetting" (p. 29).

52 This marriage has been deleted in the revisions of 1937 except for the reference of Tillie Kronberg on page 578: "And the kindness of Mr. Ottenburg! When Thea dined in her own room, her husband went down to dinner with Tillie." Curtin notes that the ending is conventional for it allows Thea to have everything. Fred is unbelievable for he is timeless and does not change; he is still at forty the romantic young lover of which Alexandra dreams (p. 108).

53 Geismar observes that "Cather treats these native manifestations of a *haute bourgeoisie* with a light touch that, from Dreiser to Tom Wolfe, is particularly rare in our social novelists"; yet he concedes "it is difficult to ignore the increasing accents of auctorial bitterness, almost of contempt, which mark the story of Cather's heroine" and adds that Chicago society, the rich city, Jessie D'Arcy, Fred's wife and even Fred himself: "are all more or less dismissed here as being merely 'Stupid Faces'" (pp. 184-5). It seems more accurate that Cather is here revealing her strong tendency to aristocratic and cultural snobbishness.

54 Giannone notes the importance of this concert in Thea's development: Dvorák brings her "union with her aesthetic desire but it is an impressionistic and momentary experience" in contrast to that of the Cliff-Dwellers, and the Valhalla Music "bodes her destiny as a distinguished Wagnerian soprano. Wagner mingles with Dvorák to create Thea's New World of Music" (p. 92).

55 Randall notes that this sexual accosting becomes symbolic of Thea's relationship to society; it represents her "dark night of the soul" in Carlylean terms, but also her rejection of human ties, specifically sexual ones, for art. In her career there are four men but the plot is rigged against marriage and art is substituted for any physical relationship (pp. 44-5).

56 But see Giannone "Old friendships are present to lay spiritual claims on the voice whose growth they shared in Of all the grace gifts the artist possesses, the most magical is the power to vault the barriers between time and place and person and construct a rainbow bridge to them all. . . . A soul has touched a soul" (p. 99). See also Geismar's comment note 39 above.

⁵⁷ Geismar, p. 83. He observes that Fremstad is "powerful, passionate, daring, intellectual."

⁵⁸ Geismar, pp. 85-6.

⁵⁹ Giannone, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Brown, p. 187.

⁶¹ Giannone observes "[Dr. Archie] offers in place of conventionalized restriction a doctrine of pleasure; the important duty is 'to live. . . ; to do all we can and enjoy all we can' . . . That she does overcome the inevitable, momentary reverses of desire and circumstance demonstrates an ability to brush ugliness and misfortune aside in favor of searching out 'the best things of this world'". He adds "Archie does not sentimentalize experience to lessen the shock", (p. 88); in truth, he changes the subject like Mrs. Harling in My Antonia. Cather finds it easy to "brush aside" ugly accidents and misfortunes because "they don't leave any lasting scar in the world, and they don't affect the future" nor do these people "really count." See discussion of this, pages 14-15, and chapter 3, note 28.

⁶² Bennett claims that for Cather "part of the fun in writing The Song of the Lark had been depicting the church enmities" (p. 87). Brown points out that she set the novel in a small town and made Thea a minister's daughter instead of a doctor to achieve "a maximum exposure to the Philistines" (p. 190). Fremstad's father intended her for the piano and exerted discipline over her training by corporal punishment, but Cather chooses to change this for her own purpose. (See "Three American Singers" pp. 43-4). In addition, Fremstad's family were all musical.

⁶³ Beebe, p. 114.

CHAPTER 8: One of Ours

¹ See Whipple, "The shrewdest criticism yet made of Miss Cather is that she represents 'the triumph of the mind over Nebraska' Her triumph over Nebraska implies that Miss Cather has also conquered the Nebraska in herself" (in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and Her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 49-50).

² The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 282.

³ See Daiches: "the story is one of frustration rather than fulfillment, and the hero finds himself only in escape from everything that life on the Nebraska plains stood for [It presents] the gradual suffocation of the sensitive and maladjusted hero until he is liberated, ironically enough, by the First World War in which he is killed. . . the conflict between the sensitive individual and the world of conventional routine" (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 47-8). Most critics have disliked the novel for varied reasons; Sergeant records "I was troubled by the chorus of critical dismay that arose from the intellectual periodicals. The evocative style of the earlier Nebraska novels had been scrapped, they said, for a lot of pedestrian detail about Midwest farm life. Was Miss Cather deserting to the mass audience? Even Mencken and Nathan, her most ardent admirers, were in a state of shock and dismay" (Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, pp. 170-1); and Cather reacted belligerently claiming that "she was (critics or not), just discovering how to write" (p. 172). Sergeant herself found the book "out of key . . . middle-aged, cold-hearted, almost querulous" (p. 171). Wilson called it "a pretty flat failure" although "she has taken what might, if it had been better handled, have provided a very interesting theme"; her characters are "like pale unfeatured silhouettes, pasted on cardboard backs and, skilfully but a little mechanically, put through the paces of puppets" (Shores of Light, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, pp. 39-40). Fadiman calls it "intolerable": "its subject matter is large, its point of view is petty" ("Willa Cather" in Nation, CXXXV, 1932, p. 563) and Van Ghent remarks "[it is] the least attractive of her books. One would like to see it quietly buried without remark" (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 25). Randall suggests it indicates a failure of moral vision and projects "an outlook on life so distorted and falsified as to be practically worthless as an interpretation of human experience" (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 160). Yet Rapin calls it one of Cather's four greatest works and claims it shares with Death Comes for the Archbishop the "greatest unity of tone" of her novels (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, p. 55). It is a work of "sustained

power, breadth of vision and of compass, variety of interest" (p. 55). "It goes deeper, it is richer in fine touches of observation and imagination, and though far more complex [than her previous novels] it is perfectly focussed" (p. 55). It suggests Dead Souls and War and Peace, and its theme is the problem of Hamlet "the lack of correspondence between the idea and the act" (pp. 66-7). The reader delights in "that sane comprehensive view of the world which gives it the force of an unprejudiced record" (p. 56). Wagenknecht calls it "as tender as Sister Carrie"; it is incomplete because the tragedy of life is incomplete ("Willa Cather" in Sewanee Review XXXVII, 1929, p. 237). And Daiches admits there is "considerable skill displayed in the individual scenes; some of the scenes are done with a keen reportorial eye and at the same time a fine sense of symbolic detail; the book is rarely dull or awkward or commonplace"; although he remarks that the impulses are never reconciled and that Cather "tried to make the war into an exploration of one of her favourite themes--the decline of the pioneering age and the plight of the imaginative hero in an increasingly narrow and self-satisfied civilization" (p. 57).

⁴ Lewis, Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 122.

⁵ Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 182.

⁶ Sergeant, p. 106. She clarifies this: "one of Willa's."

⁷ See Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1964, preface p. v., also pp. 226-7.

⁸ Beebe, p. 6.

⁹ All page references in the text are taken from One of Ours, N.Y.: Knopf, (1922) 1965.

¹⁰ Sergeant, p. 182.

¹¹ The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963, p. vi.

¹² Sergeant, p. 173. Previously, she has said that Cather too demanded "splendour" in life and that the word recurred in her talk, her books and her letters (p. 108).

¹³ Brown observes "the machine is the recurrent symbol of disaster in the Nebraska part of the novel," and links Claude's

marriage with his accident as a result of a machine and Enid with her car. But at the end, he notes, machinery ceases to be evil: "Machinery serving a humane man, with vistas of experience and some imagination, is a very different force" (Willa Cather, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 220). Giannone suggests that the spiritual aridity of the machine is the counter-symbol of music "this tension thematically contrasts dehumanization with civilization, decay with art, sorrow with happiness--and the world with Claude (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, p. 130). Randall notes that Cather blames machinery as the prevention of culture, a source of social discord; a machine economy is not aesthetic like a household economy, pp. 163-4.

¹⁴ Bloom remarks that Claude has pioneer idealism but no ability to fight for it--"a tragic reminder of the implacable consequences of materialism" (Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, Arcterus Books, 1964, p. 76). This may be tragic, but why the result of materialism?

¹⁵ Sergeant, p. 238.

¹⁶ Sergeant, p. 163.

¹⁷ Sergeant, p. 181.

¹⁸ Mencken, Review of One of Ours, 1922 in Schroeter, Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 12.

¹⁹ Mencken, pp. 11-2.

²⁰ Wagenknecht, p. 238. He continues "Miss Cather does not idealize the war. She realizes its futility. But she sees. . . the flood of generous emotion, the gallant blooming of sensitive souls."

²¹ Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather", American Literature X, 1938-9, p. 130. He adds that it is not justifiable artistically or philosophically for if death is the culmination of Claude's faith, he must accept the life he dies for, too.

²² Howard Mumford Jones, "The Novels of Willa Cather", Saturday Review of Literature XVIII August 6, 1938, p. 3 i. Yet Daiches says: "The remarkable thing about the rest of the novel . . . is that Miss Cather lets Claude find in France what he expected to find, without in any way softening the impact of the war scenes or

describing the fighting as anything other than the wasteful cruel business it actually was. The book ends with Claude's death, yet the ending is hardly tragic because any future for Claude after his experience in France could only be anticlimax" (pp. 52-4). While Hicks called her concept of the war "romantic and naive" ("The Case Against Willa Cather", English Journal XXII, Nov. 1933, p. 707), Cooperman examined the novel from a new viewpoint: "Willa Cather in One of Ours created a study of erotic war motivation unequalled until John Hersey's The War Lover appeared in 1949 Miss Cather intuitively what the latter writer deliberately describes. Her book, indeed, beneath its sentimentality and intrusive rhetoric, is a case of phallic substitution: the unmanned hero for whom death is the only possible aphrodisiac". The novel is "a study of erotic frustration and virility--through violence" ("Willa Cather and the Bright Face of Death", Literature and Psychology XIII, Summer 1963, pp. 81, 87). His examination may explain the horror and violence of the war scenes and Cather's apparent relish for the ghoulish aspects for he notes: "There is a sense of actual peace after each confrontation of death, each stimulation by violence" (p. 87).

²³ Footman, p. 129.

²⁴ Hicks, p. 707.

²⁵ Daiches, p. 54.

²⁶ This Book is based on the diary of the local doctor in Jeffrey who had been medical officer on a troop ship during an influenza epidemic (Lewis, p. 118). Sister Charles suggests that the ship Anchises is "the old debilitated father . . . who bears the young vigorous hero--Claude and his fellows--back to the land of heritage rather than westward to find a new country" (unpublished thesis, "Love and Death in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 134). As narrative, it is effective, but as an integrated part of the structure, it has no place unless we accept Cooperman's thesis (note 22 above) that the basic reality of Claude's character is "a frustrated violence . . . destined to find its release--only in the act of death" (p. 82).

²⁷ Brown, p. 217.

²⁸ Daiches, p. 54. Van Ghent comments that it employs the "naturalistic, circumstantial form of The Song of the Lark, with the same temptation to 'thesis', but grayer circumstances and almost insufferably relaxed style" (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Pamphlets on American Writers, 1964, p. 25). Lambert observes that the form, too is repetitive; "repeated

expectation and repeated disillusionment" (unpublished thesis, "Theme and Craftsmanship in Willa Cather's Novels," University of North Carolina, 1964, p. 204). And Charles suggests that the epilogue is artistically unnecessary; it brings the reader but not the hero full circle and it undercuts the validity of Claude's idealism (p. 146).

²⁹ Sergeant, p. 172.

³⁰ Quoted Lewis, p. 123.

³¹ "One of Ours" suggests Cather's belief that Claude is one of many American and Nebraska boys overseas, fighting for a cause and dying like Le Soldat Inconnu, unrecognized, for their idealism. Wagenknecht suggests the title of the novel is "as tender as Sister Carrie" and that like his countrymen, the tragedy is incomplete because his life is incomplete ("Willa Cather" in The Sewanee Review, XXXVII 1929, p. 237). Randall claims that Claude is not of the heroic breed since there is no longer a frontier to stimulate his imaginative and aesthetic growth (p. 160). Rapin calls him "a tragic because a divided figure, a pathetic and lovable example of our greatness and our impotence" (p. 68). Yet Giannone suggests that he is "among the anonymous multitude" defeated by life (p. 127), and Sergeant suggests that he is really "one of hers" (p. 106).

³² Sergeant, p. 106. Randall claims One of Ours concerns modern man in search of a soul, a frustrated search for value (p. 160). Giannone too suggests that the book concerns a search, although his journey East provides "a flight, not a heroic rise above thwarting circumstances but an unheroic escape from them (p. 127). The novel traces "an ascending development in the growth of the protagonist. As Claude Wheeler comes to know something of himself and the world. His psychological ascent is not, as one might expect, a movement from aspiration to achievement or from unawareness to illumination. Such a progress is heroic. Claude, rather goes from ambiguous faith to false belief, from disappointment to illusion (p. 135).

³³ Sergeant, p. 182.

³⁴ A Lost Lady, N.Y.: Knopf, 1963, p. 169. See also "Nebraska: The End of the Cycle" in Nation, Sept. 5, 1923.

³⁵ Quoted in Sergeant, p. 172. Van Ghent objects to this statement: "Her willingness to write in a dull manner because the boy's life was dull, her rationalization of the dullness as a per-

sonal sacrifice to her intimate knowledge of the subject . . . these are embarrassing pitfalls of a temperament that would never wholly know itself" (p. 26).

³⁶ Randall notes that France represents the right relationship to nature and civilization (p. 163), and that both American and Germany are mechanized and have replaced artistic culture by an industrial order; America then is engaged in "the defence of an agricultural France against a mechanized Germany" (p. 171).

³⁷ Randall notes this point, p. 171. This is the last frontier, he claims, but Claude lacks the pioneer spirit and imagination; he is a non-hero (p. 172).

³⁸ See identification of Cather with Claude, p. 321.

³⁹ A Lost Lady, p. 169.

⁴⁰ See The Professor's House, pp. 156, 265.

⁴¹ Willa Cather in Europe, N.Y.: Knopf, 1956, pp. 170-1.

⁴² "Nebraska", Nation, Sept. 5, 1923, p. 238. She contrasts the two societies in the previous paragraph: "[The years of trial, 1893-7] had a salutary effect upon the New State. They winnowed out the settlers with a purpose from the drifting malcontents who are ever seeking a new land where man does not live by the sweat of his brow. . . . The strongest stock survived. . . . [But now we see] the other side of the medal, stamped with the ugly crest of materialism which has set its seal upon all our most productive commonwealths. . . . Too much prosperity, too many moving-picture shows, too much gaudy fiction. . . farmer boys who want to be spenders before they are earners, girls who try to look like the heroines of the cinema screen; a coming generation which tries to cheat aesthetic sense by buying things instead of making anything. . . ." But she still has hope: "[perhaps the next generation will] go back to the old sources of culture and wisdom Surely the materialism and showy extravagance of this hour are a passing phase!" (p. 238).

⁴³ Beebe, p. 28.

⁴⁴ See Schmittlein, unpublished thesis, "Willa Cather's Novels: An Evolving Art", University of Pittsburgh, 1962, pp. 107-8.

⁴⁵ Beebe, p. v.

⁴⁶ Sergeant, p. 182. See discussion p. 321.

⁴⁷ Beebe, p. 6. See discussion p. 228.

⁴⁸ Sister Charles identifies Claude as "the most complex, profound and perceptive analysis of the Eros-Thanatos conflict within one character yet to be found in her fiction" (p. 146). She attributes to Eros "his delicate sense of human dignity, his awareness of value-criterion; his love of the natural in life; his respect for art, order and cleanliness--the imprint of man upon nature" (p. 111) and to Thanatos the violence of his emotions, his physical restlessness, his inclination towards suffering (p. 112). She suggests too that his relish of life is close to death and that destruction excites rather than disgusts him; death loses horror if it brings freedom and beauty (p. 140). Cooperman would agree with these latter statements for he feels that Claude is "the unmanned hero for whom death is the only possible aphrodisiac" (p. 81), that he feels a sense of peace after his stimulation by death or violence (p. 87). He is defined by violence, responds to people and things by action, and reveals "a frustrated violence. . . destined to find its release--indeed, to take its pleasure--only in the act of death" (p. 82). He quotes many examples of Claude's reactions in terms of violence p. 78.

⁴⁹ Sergeant, p. 172.

⁵⁰ The Song of the Lark, p. 99.

⁵¹ Lloyd Morris comments that Claude has the physical vitality, the courage of the pioneer, an instinctive idealism, an imaginative restlessness and the sharpened emotional capacities of the artist but his aspirations are incoherent now that the conditions of material existence have been conquered ("Willa Cather" in North American Review, CCXIX, 1924, p. 645). Schmittlein claims he is "sympatico" (p. 162) with a natural aesthete or worshipper of beauty; although he never accomplishes anything, his sphere of influence draws people together (pp. 130, 114). His sacrifice is wasted because the war will not preserve art (p. 129). Toler compares him to Paul; both have the inclinations and the creativity of the artist but no medium (Sister Colette Toler, unpublished thesis, "Man as Creator of Art and Civilization, in the Works of Willa Cather," University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 111); he has no joy of creating but only the thrill of preserving (p. 124). Toler adds that "neither her skill nor feeling could make a really interesting figure of Claude" (p. 125). Yet Rapin

finds him to be one of Cather's "real men in a real world," one of her convincing portraits of men (pp. 96, 42). Wagenknecht refutes Boynton's objections that Claude is unlike a typical soldier, for, he claims, Claude is not typical but exceptional (p. 238). Clearly Cather thought so, but there is no real indication why. Giannone points out that the word "Claude" means "lame", that he is a psychic cripple who is defeated in education, farming, and marriage (p. 127). Apparently Cather intended the name to be pronounced "Clōd," for Claude objects that Enid calls him "Clōd" (rather fittingly) (see p. 208).

⁵² See p. 162 and footnote 51 above. He defines the afficionado as the art connoisseur and the sympatico who is sympathetic to art but lacks the emotional, intellectual or creative ability of the artist (p. 58). See discussion of this p. 226. Fred Ottenburg and Dr. Archie belong in the second class but Claude is clearly differentiated from them.

⁵³ The Song of the Lark, p. 177.

⁵⁴ Randall points out the irony here; the German Ehrlichs represent just such a culture that Claude goes to France to preserve from the invasion of German materialism (p. 171).

⁵⁵ Daiches, p. 53. He calls Gladys "a mere bundle of literary conventions" (p. 53) yet Brown claims that "Gladys Farmer is rendered with equal skill [to Enid's father]. If her full strength had been let loose on the novel, there would have been an end to grayness" (p. 222). Her full strength of course was let loose on Claude but to no avail.

⁵⁶ Sergeant, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Sergeant, p. 145.

⁵⁸ Quoted Brown, p. 99.

⁵⁹ Daiches, p. 52.

⁶⁰ Brown, pp. 224-5.

⁶¹ Quoted Brown, pp. 226-7.

⁶² Giannone contrasts the violin and mechanism as two opposing

symbols. The violin is smashed by a car, and war, the supreme example of mechanism, destroys the violinist: "Music has no defense against its adversary" (pp. 138-9).

⁶³ Brown, p. 215.

⁶⁴ New York Herald, December 24, 1922, quoted in Sergeant, p. 174.

⁶⁵ Sergeant, p. 175.

⁶⁶ Sergeant, pp. 179-80. This is the source for much of David's opinions on war. "He didn't believe that any war could end war; he didn't believe that this one was going to make the world safe for democracy, or that it had much to do with democracy whatever. He didn't see any Utopia ahead. He didn't believe that the war was going to get the world anywhere, no matter how it came out" (p. 176). At first resigned and bitter, he later changed for he felt it provided him with a relationship to other young men. He said "The men were splendid" and wrote to his mother "When you have seen and met men who have been through the inferno many times, every belief you ever held is either destroyed or tempered more strongly--in whose place I find new, better and stronger ones. Everyone finds his belief, his religion--here I have found mine. I adhere to no creed, . . . [but] I believe. I have faith. I know that for all those heroic souls gone to the beyond there is some future. But those who die, be it recklessly or by the most unexpected exploding shell, have a compensation more than a mere title of hero or a posthumous service cross. You don't try to explain it--but you know it in France" (pp. 178-9).

⁶⁷ Sergeant, p. 180. She points out that Cather's "deepest compassion was roused by voiceless human beings whom she felt to be at the mercy of life and fate--like an old poor white servant, or an old grandmother" rather than by such as David (p. 180). Daiches calls David "a not very convincing symbol of that combination of American ideals and European culture which is what Claude has been searching for" (p. 54).

⁶⁸ See Cather's source note 65 above.

⁶⁹ Sergeant, p. 159.

⁷⁰ Sergeant, p. 171.

CHAPTER 9: A Lost Lady

¹ All page references in the text are from A Lost Lady, N.Y.: Knopf, 1963.

² Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, Preface.

³ John Randall, The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 174.

⁴ The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 105.

⁵ Sergeant, Fire Under the Andes, N.Y.: Knopf, 1927, p. 279. A Lost Lady has been admired by most Cather critics. Daiches called it "one of the most perfectly modulated of Willa Cather's novels" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 63). Snell called it "an almost perfect story" without sentimentality or melodrama, and more American than Henry James (The Shapers of American Fiction, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton, 1947, p. 154); Lloyd Morris claimed it has "balanced control over content and structure" ("Willa Cather" in North American Review CCXIX 1924, p. 651. Thomas Hardy told Stephen Tennant, the editor of On Writing, how warmly he admired the novel (Quoted in Lewis, Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 178), and even Randall finds it one of Cather's best novels where action and symbol are unified and Cather treats the nature of life, the meaning of civilization, and interprets her own epoch (p. 174). Yet there is some dissent; Brown agrees that the movement of images and colour, the intensity of the novel are striking, but observes that it is "not one of Miss Cather's very best. It has a grave intellectual weakness, a weakness of vision" which lies in our inability to grant to her pioneers the heroism and grandness which Cather attributes to them ("Willa Cather" in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 78); see note 27 below for further discussion. Van Ghent objects to the "weakness of cliché, sentimentality of thought in dealing with a decline of values, and thesis-writing which lacks sensuousness (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 28) and Berthoff to the "vindictive cartoon harassment" with which she depicts her message of maturity or its spiritual lack (The Ferment of Realism, N.Y.: The Free Press (Macmillan) 1965, p. 257). See also the comments on the morality of Marian Forrester note 22 below.

⁶ Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 187.

⁷ See Lewis, p. 125, also quoted in Brown, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. 228-9; Sergeant, p. 188.

⁸ Dorothy Van Ghent, Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 28.

⁹ William Curtin, unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Wisconsin, 1959, p. 162.

¹⁰ Chamaillard, "Le Cas de Marian Forrester," Révue Anglo-Américaine VIII, 1931, p. 425.

¹¹ My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961, p. 328.

¹² Kronenberger, "Willa Cather," Bookman, (U.S.) LXXIV, 1931, p. 140. See also Snell; "one of the best realized short stories in our literature" p. 154. Sergeant claims it is the perfect "novel démeublé": "short, pointed, condensed, episodic" (p. 185), and Whipple admires its "classic severity": "she has achieved, in her subordination of all detail, in her clarity and unity and order, in the apparent ease which shows her mastery, in her restraint and finish, a rigorous perfection of form" (Spokesmen, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963, p. 143.

¹³ Morris, p. 651.

¹⁴ Sergeant, p. 139.

¹⁵ Curtin notes that the structure is opposite to that of One of Ours; "the first part sketches the waning of an older, grander age and environment, corresponding to the last half of One of Ours. The second part of A Lost Lady shows the triumph of modern, materialistic civilization akin to the first half of One of Ours." A Lost Lady moves from positive to negative, One of Ours from negative to positive yet they share a common view, "The nature of life is disillusionment; life is not what it seems--it is wholly at the mercy of accident" (pp. 150-1).

¹⁶ Schmittlein comments "Willa Cather symbolically captures the decomposition of the pioneering men in the masculine-feminine Neil Herbert versus Ivy Peters", adding that it is ironic that Ivy, not Neil, reveals the future of the West (unpublished thesis,

"Willa Cather's Novels: An Evolving Art", University of Pittsburgh, 1962, p. 245).

¹⁷ Chamaillard, p. 421; her expression of this is "son charme, mail il est infini." He notes of Alexandra, St. Peter, Myra and Marian, "il leur manque la force d'être des pionniers, la conscience d'être des artists, les qualties de volonté, de delicatesse esthetique ou morale, qui les sauveraient de l'ignominieuse défaite qu'est leur vie; ce sont les grands perdants" (p. 421). Marian is passive, unheroic, lacking the faith of the pioneer and the conscience of the artist; while Marie dies, she and Myra must live on to face the future (p. 424). Randall suggests that she represents the nineteenth century view of women as "cultural conservators", a source of "civilized values and moral tone"; Marian transmits and embodies the values of civilization (pp. 179-80). Krutch too notes her role as the artist: "The lady, though she did not write nor paint nor sing, was essentially an artist. She was consciously a lady, and she had devoted her vitality to the creation of a person who was more than a person, who was The Lady as a type and as a work of art, so that when she failed, she failed as an artist. . . . She was not artist enough to refuse to do at all what she could not do worthily. . . . The lost lady was guilty because she put her own happiness before her art and betrayed her ideal to snatch at the joy of life" (Review of A Lost Lady, Nation, Nov. 28, 1923 in Schroeter, Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 54).

¹⁸ Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, pp. 69-70.

¹⁹ Adams, unpublished thesis, "Six Novels of Willa Cather", Ohio State University, 1961, p. 115. He says that the novel like The Song of the Lark deals with the artist in opposition to the town, with her decline and her failure after she will not accept an old-fashioned code. The thematic centre is the development of the artist but there is a swift rise and a long fall (p. 115).

²⁰ Bennett, p. 75. See her own account in Sergeant to a New York World Reporter; "A Lost Lady was a beautiful ghost in my mind for twenty years before it came together as a possible subject for presentation. All the lovely emotions that one has found, some day appear with bodies, and it isn't as if one found ideas suddenly. Before this, the memories of these experiences and emotions have been like a perfume" (p. 187), and Sergeant adds "it took her thirty years to reduce her [Mrs. Silas Garber] to a quintessence; to turn her into a paradox. . . . Not only a literary masterpiece, it was a psychic milestone" (p. 107).

²¹ Giannone claims that this laugh is "Willa Cather's metaphor explaining the psychological movement the book follows"; Neil's first impression of her is essentially auditory, for her voice, "its variations in mood and range is the notable trait of the lady's charm" which becomes as well "a musical symbol of her epoch. The double story of a lady's decline and of an age passing away follows the rhythmic rise and fall of her laugh. . . [which is] a fading anthem for a lost era" (*Music in Willa Cather's Fiction*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 142-3, 146).

²² There has been considerable comment on this, particularly from earlier critics. Randall parallels her to Madame Bovary, both desiring beauty in a bourgeois world (p. 176) and suggests that Cather is both fascinated by and rejecting her sexual basis; that there is no chaste knight but only vulgarians who seek her suggests the fate of the modern world (pp. 200-1). Chamaillard notes that this art is basically sexual yet "it keeps a freshness, a purity, an irresistible naivety" in innocents. Her feminine charm is creative like poetry and "requires something to nourish it, or it consumes itself" (p. 422). Adams points out that her suggestion of raciness is achieved by her association with red: the red parasol, her scarves, and earrings, the roses, even cherries (pp. 129 ff). Daiches calls her an "epitome of aristocratic grace, kindness and understanding, and a vulgarian who will do anything--deceive her husband, make advances to coarse and unprincipled young men--to get some excitement out of life"; he suggests that Cather is interested less in her degeneration than in her as a paradox (p. 59). Boynton objects that she is "inherently self-defeating," a weakling and ne'er-do-well with a tarnished reputation and "not even brilliantly alluring," that the Elizabethans "did well to call such a woman a 'drab'" (*America in Contemporary Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940, p. 161; *Some Contemporary Americans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924, p. 175), and Ravitz quotes Garland's comment: "[A Lost Lady is] a concession to the people who want female libertines in their books" and it proves that moderns in the New West "thoroughly destroy these ideals of honesty and integrity that had been inherent in the characters of our early western pioneers" ("Willa Cather Under Fire", *Western Humanities Review* IX Spring 1955, p. 182). He says of Mrs. Forrester, "Superficially she is attractive and exciting, impetuous and ever youthful, but deep within she is base and corrupt. She is barren both morally and physically, producing no children and contributing little positive good to her own limited social circle. . . . [She and Ivy Peters are the] culminating symbol of the book; the virtue, integrity and morality of the frontier have been replaced by a degenerate sensualism" (p. 183).

²³ Randall observes that for Cather, the rejection of the present is a virtue because the present contains no beauty; Marian Forrester

does not reject it and therefore is lost" (p. 174).

²⁴ Wilson in The Shores of Light, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 43. He compares her to James; "[it is] almost impossible for her to describe an emotion or an action except at second hand"; and she uses James' indirect method; where she cannot use Neil as in the sleigh scene with Frank she makes use of Blum, "a subsidiary, limpid young man whose function is to witness phenomena unmanageable for the first" (p. 43). Curtin suggests that in this scene, Cather's own view corresponds with that of the Blum boy rather than with Neil's (p. 168).

²⁵ See Randall note 22 above for Cather's own position.

²⁶ This is quoted from Shakespeare's sonnet # 94, perhaps suggesting equally the sexual impurity or the corruption of idealism in the "lover" if we can call Neil that. Randall notes that Cather is actually equating the chastity of women with the moral integrity of a civilization in this passage (p. 180).

²⁷ Snell says of Captain Forrester that he is "one of Willa Cather's best male creations" even though he is seen through a woman's eyes (p. 155) and Wilson that she has presented a sketch, "one of the most sensitive and accurate that has ever been put into a novel of the best type of old-fashioned American of the post-civil-war period--a type greatly preferable, I grant Miss Cather, in its straightforwardness and simplicity and honesty, for all its cultural limitations, to the sharpers who superseded it" (p. 43). Randall agrees that the Captain has the virtues of the pioneer, "the imagination to see, the strength to achieve, and an absolutely incorruptible moral integrity" (p. 178) and Adams finds the Captain "one of the most refined of pioneers, mannerly, generous, brave, self-sacrificing, absolutely honest" (p. 138). It is only Brown and Geismar who question this; Brown points out "Her pioneers will not quite bear the weight she assigns to them. . . . Miss Cather asks us to believe that as a group, by definition, her builders and founders have a spiritual breadth, a heroic wisdom, for which it is difficult indeed to extort our assent. . . . [They] are not grand enough for their role" (Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 78), and Geismar suggests that the story is a fairy-tale of the "almost mythical pioneer" who is in truth akin to the robber barons of the period (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 183).

²⁸ Randall suggests that the slitting of the woodpecker's eyes portrays Cather's distrust of science and also symbolizes the fate of the lost lady in its blindness and its inability to see the sun

(p. 184). Bloom finds the crime against the woodpecker a crime like those of the Ancient Narrator and Poe's hero in "The Black Cat"; it is a crime against Nature and God. It symbolizes the frontier attacked by destructive materialism and its confusion and retreat. Like Adam, Eve and Satan, Ivy wilfully violates theological and philosophical conceptions of creation and makes his own greed and his whims the sole motive for his actions. The Captain and his wife provide foils for his character; the Captain is "the tragic agent of a weakened morality which precludes his defense of that which he recognizes as just" and Marian is unable to identify right and wrong and choose one or the other (The Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Souther Illinois University Press, Arcturus Books, 1964, pp. 68-70).

29 Randall notes the centrality of money in the novel; it causes the downfall of both the Forresters who find it difficult to exist in the modern world without wealth. Like Flaubert, Cather reveals her hatred of the bourgeoisie (p. 199).

30 Randall notes that the aesthetic life is valuable only in relation to pioneer virtues and without these, it cannot be aesthetic (p. 186). The Captain has imposed order on his environment and therefore has founded a civilization in Sweetwater, but he is ruined because he chooses perfect honesty and probity to aesthetic grace (p. 190) and Marian, caught between these old graces and the new money and recognizing that they are incompatible, chooses the latter and life (pp. 193-4).

31 Giannone suggests that this first dinner-party is in itself nostalgic; it is "a shadow of the past, this affair a travesty of it. . . . Willa Cather exposes loutish people to an atmosphere combining the dullness of each person in the group. Paucity of spirit means paucity of mirth" (p. 149). The two dinners are thematically and pictorially balanced and diametrically opposite (pp. 148-9).

32 Marian, to the Blooms, typifies the tragic apathy of the pioneers; she is "the tragic heroine whose moral indifference places her at the core of a great transitional crisis. Like the frontier itself, she is receptive to the influence of the new order [She is] genuinely tragic because she drifts away from the felicitous spirit of the pioneer and is absorbed into the new evil order" (p. 73). Her surrender to Ivy is the physical manifestation of her final dissolution" (p. 74). But see Randall who parallels the West to the Wasteland and the Captain to the Fisher King; Marian must reverse the failure of the crops and reestablish the bases of life by her fertility rites (pp. 200-1). Curtin suggests that the unrelieved picture of Ivy is due to the nouvelle form and "should

not be taken as Miss Cather's complete view of modern society" (p. 163). "Miss Cather did not lament that time has caused a change in the world. She lamented that the change makes culture and humanity less possible. She did not say that the old order was perfect. She said that it was human" (p. 163). Is it not then Cather's tragedy that she can see no humanity in the new order and must symbolize it only in the extreme Ivy Peters and Bayliss Wheeler?

³³ Geismar, p. 183.

³⁴ Chamaillard notes that she is not "lost" to Neil, who is both the source of the tragedy and the purged spectator representing humanity. Through contact with Marian Forrester, he comes to a disillusionment which is sad but inevitable, and to an understanding with the Captain that beauty is no less beautiful because it is imperfect (pp. 425-6). "Neil is devoted, suffers, is devoted again and in the end he gains; he becomes better than before. All is not lost of Marian Forrester" (p. 427).

CHAPTER 10: The Professor's House

¹ Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, Preface.

² Not Under Forty, p. 61.

³ The criticism of the novel varies greatly. Krutch comments in a review in the Nation 1925, "her new novel is not one of her best . . . Fragmentary and inconclusive, it starts off in several directions but never quite arrives at any of the proposed destinations" (in Schroeter ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 55-6). Kazin claims it is "the most persistently underrated of her novels. Actually it is one of those imperfect and ambitious works whose very imperfections illuminate the quality of an imagination" (On Native Grounds, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956, p. 188). Commager calls it "a morality play, its characters authentic enough but symbols, each of them, of virtues and vices" ("Willa Cather" in Schroeter, Willa Cather and her Critics, p. 214) and adds that it was "an acknowledgement of defeat, and after that Miss Cather seemed to give up even the pretense of finding something worthwhile in contemporary life" (p. 215) while Brown eulogizes: "More boldly, more simply than Virginia Woolf she sings the splendour of life" (Rhythm in the Novel, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950, pp. 76-7). And Randall calls it "the turning point of her career in its theme of creative effort versus human relations. 'This bizarre book' has almost no external action and its structure communicates the theme, Book II's incongruity being vital to the meaning, the limitations of the Professor's will and the demands of his family which he will not admit and which lead to loss of faith in life (The Landscape and the Looking Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 202-4), while Edel adds that The Professor's House is "unsymmetrical and unrealized" because Cather "could not bring the two parts of her broken world together again." (Literary Biography, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1959, p. 122).

⁴ Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 215. Sergeant specifies these: "a physical love for a long swim in a blue lake, a knowledge of how to cook a roast of lamb saignant with garlic. . . attachments that had no connection with modern conveniences . . . and an experience with his creative faculties closely resembling the one Willa Cather had described to me in Bank Street" (Sergeant, p. 215). See p. 389. for this passage. Brown calls the novel "almost the most revealing of her novels" (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 237).

⁵ Sergeant, p. 204. She also wrote in a note to Frost that it was a story of "letting go of the heart" (q. p. 215).

⁶ Hoffman, The Twenties, N.Y.: Collier, 1962, p. 90.

⁷ See also Leon Edel, "The Paradox of Success" in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and her Critics.

⁸ Schroeter, "Willa Cather and The Professor's House" in Schroeter ed. Willa Cather and her Critics, pp. 373-5.

⁹ Schroeter, pp. 369-70. He comments more fully on the turquoise as "a gift from Tom Outland: it has never been bought or sold, it is made by hand, it is the product of an ancient and vanished Indian civilization, and its value is of the intrinsic sort conferred by its origin and the beauty of the motives behind Outland's finding it and then giving it as a gift. . . . The half-forgotten Indian bracelet represents true beauty, while the over-valued gold necklace represents the false" (p. 369).

¹⁰ Sergeant, pp. 203-4.

¹¹ Letter "On the Professor's House" reprinted in On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, pp. 31-2 .

¹² Giannone, Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, p. 153. Book I is a dramatic presentation of the two themes money and ideals, II a lyrical fantasia and III a startling blend of both the real and the imaginary worlds. See pp. 154-6 for statement and 156-60 for a detailed analysis of this structure. See also Brown (Rhythm in the Novel, pp. 71-8) and Bloom (Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, Arcturus Books, 1964, pp. 157-61).

¹³ Giannone, p. 152.

¹⁴ Brown remarks "the arrangement and interweaving in The Professor's House with the shock, the revelation in the final part, are highly and stirringly experimental" (Rhythm in the Novel, p. 77), commenting on "the profound unity of the third part"; the cliff episode is "a profound, unconscious, preparation for death, for the last house of the professor" (Willa Cather, p. 75). Whipple suggests a fourth metaphor for this structure: "she has carved a set of Chinese filigree boxes, one within another, out of a substance as firm as ivory" ("Willa Cather" in Spokesmen, Berkeley; University of California Press, 1963, p. 148). Yet Kazin's comment that "The violence with which she broke the book in half. . . was a technical mistake which has damned the book" (p. 188) indicates the extensive

criticism of this device at the time. See also the review of Joseph Krutch: "fragmentary and inconclusive, it starts off in several directions but never quite arrives at any destination" (Nation, 1925 in Schroeter, Willa Cather and her Critics, pp. 55-6).

¹⁵ Leon Edel in Literary Biography, p. 104. Edel proffers a psychoanalytical solution which he later rejects for a historical one, that Cather's "break" of 1922, attributed to the war, was really the result of Isabella's marriage to Jan Hambourg. As a mother-figure, Isabella had rejected Cather for Jan whom Cather hated (Schroeter suggests this hatred also, p. 375-6). She linked the tower and the mesa to the McClung household in Pittsburgh where she had previously lived, and saw its sewing-room as a sanctuary and Isabella as a patroness of the arts. The Professor's House is "unsymmetrical and unrealized" because Willa Cather's world was broken itself (pp. 120-1).

¹⁶ Adams suggests that this proves that the sadness and disgust were based on real and not imaginary situations (unpublished thesis, "Six Novels of Willa Cather", Ohio State University, 1961, p. 180).

¹⁷ Sergeant, p. 215.

¹⁸ Giannone points out that the essential drama is in the protagonist's mind (pp. 151-2); "the novel endorses ideals which are nowhere embodied in the narrative present. . . . [The Blue Mesa] is now a place of the mind, beautiful but intangible" (p. 152).

¹⁹ On Writing, p. 125.

²⁰ Edel, "The Paradox of Success," pp. 262-3.

²¹ Brown, Willa Cather, p. 237. He suggests that Tom's possible fate at the hands of society was in fact, her own: "What change would have come in his blue eye. . ." (The Professor's House, p. 261).

²² On Writing, pp. 31-2.

²³ Brown quotes a sentence deleted after the first edition: [The War had] in one great catastrophe, swept away all youth and all palms, and almost Time itself" (Willa Cather, p. 239).

²⁴ Hinz notes the theme of the novel as "the disintegration of an organic, creative society before an encroaching materialism" ("A

Lost Lady and The Professor's House" in The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIX, 1953, p. 74). For the development of this theme of exploitation see Randall, (The Landscape and the Looking Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 218).

²⁵ Sergeant, p. 215. See note 4 above.

²⁶ Kazin has said "St. Peter is the archetype of all her characters and the embodiment of her own beliefs. He is not merely the scholar as artist, the son of pioneer parents who has carried the pioneer passion into the world of art and thought; he is what Willa Cather herself has always been or hoped to be--a pioneer in mind, a Catholic by instinct, French by inclination, a spiritual aristocrat with democratic manners. The tragedy of St. Peter is thus the most signal and illuminating of all Willa Cather's tragedies" (p. 188). The Professor is "the most complex personality Willa Cather ever created: historian, artist, gourmet", and modelled on Le Mannequin of Anatole France (Hinz, "A Lost Lady and The Professor's House," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIX, 1953, p. 77). Geismar considers him typical of the mid-twentieth century aesthetic revolt against materialism, "a rather effete professor in a commonplace hinterland college" who mirrors "the delicacy of the indoor arts" and offers "a little sermon on manners for less enlightened midlanders" (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, pp. 183-4). For parallelism see Leon Edel, "The Paradox of Success" in Schroeter, pp. 249-71.

²⁷ See Sergeant, p. 215 for the parallel between this experience and Cather's own.

²⁸ Toler claims that the Professor is Cather's first intellectual while Cather's other artists are intuitive, and that he lives both in the world of creativity and of daily reality (unpublished thesis, "Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather", University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 129). It has also been suggested that the Professor is primarily Apollonian while Cather's other artists are Dionysiac. But see the similarity of the passage here and the identification of Cather's viewpoint with the Professor's in artistic passion notes 4, 26, 27.

²⁹ Randall notes that Tom combines the individualism of the cow-puncher, and the appreciation of order and organization of the Cliff-Dwellers, and balances the individual and the community, innovation and tradition, spontaneity and ritual which Cather considered ideal (p. 211).

³⁰ Toler notes that Tom and the Mesa are extensions of St. Peter's history, and that the life of St. Peter is an extension of Tom's ideals and principles after his death (p. 144). Daiches points out the novel's emphasis on a single character and suggests the parallelism of Tom and the Professor. Both explore "certain phases of sensibility, aspects of character which in some degree and at some time are bound to come into conflict with the demands of the conventional world. Both see history as "a series of past human adventures whose implications reverberate excitingly into the present" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 63-4, 67). Thus Tom becomes a symbol of the Professor's attitude to history.

³¹ See My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961, pp. 262, 270 and discussion pp. 159-60.

³² See Lewis, Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 94; also Sergeant, p. 204: "The cliff-dweller part was based, she said, on a true story that Willa had heard on the Navajo Reservation from a famous family of Indian traders, the Wetherills" (p. 204).

³³ This passage suggests that Cather would admit this. See Brown, Willa Cather, for a suggestion that Cather interpreted this personally, p. 237, note 21, above. Bloom claims that the novel is a single attack upon science as amoral and denying the existence of good and evil. It is impersonal, aimless, and reckless. Tom's theory was brilliant as long as it remained unapplied, but converted into machinery by non-idealists, it is the instrument of evil, corrupting and destroying (pp. 89-90). It is the nature of all inherited wealth to be made evil by its later uncreative use for it breeds pride, creates jealousy and lacks a sense of responsibility which forms a disparity between the original ideal and its end (p. 90).

³⁴ Randall observes that Tom would be alien in the modern world as "Outland"; Cather's idea of sanctuary is to isolate good to protect it from the modern environment, to freeze the social order to put off the destruction of beauty (pp. 218-9). Her ideal was that the modern man should be part of a cultural tradition and achieve wholeness through a correct relationship to the past (p. 211). But this is impossible for the present society and thus she contrasts man's past unity with his present fragmentation (p. 217). Before the industrial revolution there was no split between the useful and the beautiful, between fact and value (p. 217).

³⁵ The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963, p. 147.

³⁶ See note 9 on Schroeter's comment on the value of this jewellery.

³⁷ Brown, Willa Cather, pp. 240-45; Rhythm in the Novel, pp. 71-8. He observes that the Marcellus' new house is without a vestige of American feeling and suitably "Outland" (Willa Cather, pp. 73-4).

³⁸ See Brown, Rhythm in the Novel, pp. 73-4. He comments that the houses are not overtly contrasted, yet the emphasis on social unity of the whole among the Cliff-Dwellers is contrasted with the emphasis on individual buildings in Hamilton (Willa Cather p. 242).

³⁹ Hoffman links the old house and the mesa: both are "remains" which Tom and the Professor prefer to human reality; both have been left after an attack by a predatory society which takes away their young and the Professor's family; both inspire religious emotions. The Professor wants to negate the present and translate himself into the past (The Twenties, p. 189). Edel suggests a psychoanalytic parallel; the caves and the pottery are both female figures and represent the womb. Tom preserves his notebook record as "a record of his narcissistic-infantile paradise, the paradise of life in the womb, of possessing the mother physically" (Literary Biography, pp. 108-9). The Professor is nearly suffocated in his attic room; he is living beyond his time in the womb and saved at the last minute by the mother-figure Augusta. The novel thus ends with the problem unsolved except that "Mother Earth will enclose him in her womb" (pp. 109-10). Edel poses this theory but rejects it for a biographical and social one.

⁴⁰ Brown comments that the Cliff-Dwellers are similar to Keats' Urn but does not suggest this parallel. Brannan's description of them as "frozen music", which Giannone interprets to mean freedom from sound and conventional music and therefore above music, actually suggests the same connotation as Keats "cold pastoral" (see Giannone, p. 164; Brennan, "Willa Cather and Music," University Review, XXXI, Spring 1965, p. 260).

⁴¹ Sherman calls the Professor "a spirit reluctantly bidding farewell to a generation of American life, to a vanishing order of civilization". The Mesa provides "his essentially romantic spirit a refuge and a retreat" (Critical Woodcuts, N.Y.: Scribner's, 1926) pp. 36, 48.

⁴² Not Under Forty, pp. 135-6.

43 Randall suggests that Cather deals again with the theme of art versus human relations but here both sides are given; both Roddy and Lillian are made real and given warmth, generosity and beauty. Both Tom and the Professor must struggle against their materialism and sacrifice their friends for their ideas; both choose art to life but realize the cost (pp. 219-225). The Professor and his wife are closest together during the opera Mignon but it is immediately after that that the Professor realizes that his dreams do not include Lillian. Giannone comments that the opera is important as a counter-theme; Mignon returns to regain "family, love and country" while The Professor's House holds no such promise, offers no such romantic design of human destiny. Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland remain strangers without a refuge (p. 163).

44 Schroeter compares Tom and Marcellus as symbols of their two societies. Tom represents "the genuine American pioneer tradition. By contrast, Marcellus, whose background is unknown or unmentioned, represents no tradition at all." Although a Jew, he has lost all identifying marks and seems "of indefinite nationality." Tom is doubly the creator in his archeological discovery and his vacuum; Marcellus is uncreative, "the exploiter parasitically battens off what he creates" (pp. 371-2). He notes that the central symbols are the turquoise Indian bracelet given Rosamond by Tom and the gold necklace given her by Louis. Engaged to Tom, she married Louis after his death. A major part of the contrast is the relation to money; when the Marcelluses call their house "Outland," the Professor remarks: "Outland doesn't need their generosity. They've got everything he ought to have had, and the least they can do is to be quiet about it, and not convert his very bones into a personal asset" (p. 47), and later he adds sharply "Let's omit the verb 'to buy' in all forms for a time" (p. 154). The novel suggests that the corruption of modern society, the family, Crane and the university and America itself, is directly attributable to commercialism.

45 Brown notes that this is the Professor's last house (Willa Cather, pp. 24-5). Sergeant comments that Cather apparently intended St. Peter and Myra Henshawe to "symbolize heroic failure against odds. They are opposites, since one died, perversely, of riches and the other, aggrievedly, of poverty". Yet she adds "I find both St. Peter and Myra Henshawe resentful and unprecise in apprehending the working of fate in their lives" for they were "evading, by a sort of right to personal solitude, the usual human responsibility to lifetime relationships, they seem to betray a profound disillusion about marriage as a solution for exceptional people" (pp. 219-20).

46 See Curtin (unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Wisconsin, 1959),: "The irony of the novel is based on Miss Cather's view of

human nature. She saw more than the Professor. She saw the paradox that the creative person must cut himself off from other human beings, as the Professor did in his study, in order to create a human civilization. . . [yet these achievements] are destroyed by the very conditions necessary for their production. . . . For Miss Cather, the tragedy of man is that the creativity that makes him most human also deprives him of the means of surviving the inevitable hardness of human life" (pp. 177-8). George White comments that the world is made up of illusions of "love, fame, ambition, money, family, war, art or life itself." These must be destroyed before the individual is released and St. Peter must "strip away illusions to find permanence" ("Willa Cather" in Sewanee Review L 1942, p. 21). But what permanence does St. Peter actually find? Giannone remarks "Apathetically resigned to a future without certitude or joy, he has, at least, the fortitude which comes from knowing that his work once has aspired toward an ideal even if it did not reach the ideal as did Tom's" (p. 166). But what ideal did Tom really reach that the Professor could not? Cather never makes clear except by suggesting that he dies to remain uncorrupted.

⁴⁷Brown, Willa Cather, p. 246.

⁴⁸Quoted by Scott in "Religious Symbolism in Contemporary Literature" in Johnson ed. Religious Symbolism, N.Y.: Harper Bros. 1955, p. 60. For a discussion of this definition see p. 411.

⁴⁹Randall, p. 233. Trilling observes that 'making the most of things' becomes more important than art (p. 151) and Van Ghent, that its dramatic concern is "the psychological price of renunciation"; there is a "deathiness" about the novel since St. Peter discovers himself only as a projection of Tom and his youthful self (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 32). Yet Giannone who agrees that The Professor's House "urges stoicism with a minimum commitment to death" counters this with the statement: "the author's warm understanding of St. Peter's disillusionment offsets the despair of his condition" (p. 169). Takano agrees that the novel finds no solution and is therefore typical of the lost generation whereas Dreiser's American Tragedy is no tragedy for its solution is the reformation of social ills ("Willa Cather" in Tsuda Review V, 1960, p. 9-12). The name Godfrey St. Peter is here perhaps significant. Hinz interprets it as God-free; he must learn to live without delight (p. 80). Giannone ties it in with the music of the Requiem which he hears but never comprehends: "He hears the bitter outburst of the Requiem but not the reassuring conclusion. He remains, as his name suggests, a St. Peter free of God. He will never know, to paraphrase St. Paul's enquiry, that it is the ideal which removes death's sting" ("Music in The Professor's House", College English XXVI 1964-5, p. 467. See Music in Willa Cather's Fiction for a variant in wording pp. 166-7). Adams notes that he drops the Napoleon but suggests Godfrey to be "peace of God" or peace-maker and St. Peter the rock on which religion is built (p.

175). I suggest that Cather here is ironic in the use of "St. Peter."

⁵⁰ Sergeant, p. 238.

⁵¹ Adams suggests that the tower is the height of aspiration, the fusion of science and art (p. 212).

⁵² Giannone records a previous angelus bell which "suggests the scholar's own commitment to an ideal" since it causes him to contrast his work with the greed and envy of his daughters' relationship; this underscores Cather's theme of sanctity and profanation as it is "meant to remind us: the divine direction which creative human endeavour must have" (pp. 160-1). He suggests also that the second bell summons the Professor to "an important event, a civil ritual" in summoning him to ritual dining like a worker in the fields (p. 161).

⁵³ Edel suggests that Augusta is a mother symbol both protective and erotic which saves the Professor from the womb, represented by his infantile regression and withdrawal from society into the cave-like attic (*Literary Biography*, p. 107). There certainly seems to be little of the erotic about Augusta, although she may be quite possibly a mother-figure.

⁵⁴ Randall suggests that this resolution is not religious but Stoic, that Willa Cather identifies with St. Peter and Myra, and, realizing that she cannot control the world with her will, gives up the attempt (p. 234). It is a spiritual suicide; she no longer believes in the conquering will but passively accepts chance with Augusta (p. 233). Takano compares him to Alexandra; "Death has made life possible for the professor. He has relinquished something which he had held on to as absolutely necessary for life to be worth living. Now he is able to live on a lower level, so to speak. He is never going to be hurt too much by unhappiness. . . . Thus, by a purely internal process, the professor has brought himself back to a reconciliation with life. Nothing outside has changed. . . . The professor by himself has made terms with life. . . . It is not exactly a compromise or a resignation, but a kind of willing acceptance and surrender, which the professor has almost involuntarily learned to prefer to despair" (pp. 14-5). But surrender to what? Certainly not God.

⁵⁵ The Song of the Lark, p. 411.

⁵⁶ Sergeant, p. 121.

⁵⁷ My Ántonia, pp. 271-2.

PART III: THE ORDER OF RELIGION

CHAPTER 11: INTRODUCTION

¹Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Montreal, 1959.

²George Grantl, ed., Catholicism, N.Y.: Washington Square Press, 1961, p. 9.

³Catholicism, p. 12.

⁴Quoted in Scott, "Religious Symbolism in Contemporary Literature" in Johnson, ed. Religious Symbolism, N.Y.: Harper Brothers, 1955, p. 60.

⁵Randall Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958, p. 3. See also the definition of William Goodenough "Religion is what a man does (mentally as well as physically) in response to his convictions, or possibly to his unconscious assumptions, as to the nature of the forces which really control himself and his environment" (Quoted in Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather", American Literature X, May 1938, p. 130).

⁶Stewart, p. 12.

⁷For a full discussion of this topic see Margaret M. Maison, The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel, N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1961.

⁸Stewart, p. 17. He says of Hawthorne, James and Eliot that they are Puritan in the sense of having "a vein of asceticism, of restraint, of discipline. There is the assumption of human imperfection and of the long discipline necessary to human improvement. There is a point in the exploration of these writers where Puritanism and Classicism become rival claimants, or perhaps complement any tendencies and the Puritan-Christian discipline merges with the classic" (p. 17).

⁹Stewart, p. 99. Stewart amplifies this; they are counter-Romantics because "they recognize Original Sin, because they show the

conflict between good and evil, because they show man's struggle toward redemption, because they dramatize the necessary role of suffering in the purification of the self. They do not apotheoze the self, as romantics like Ellen Glasgow and Wharton do, but warn against its perversities, its obsessions, its insidious deceptions". He notes that Billy Budd's stutter, like Georgina's Birthmark, is a sign of original sin and both disappear in the end (p. 99).

¹⁰Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion, Chicago: Willett Clark, 1934, p. 141. Luccock quotes Dreiser in 1931: "Life is to me too much of a welter and play of inscrutable forces to permit of any significant comment. . . . As I see him, the unutterably infinitesimal individual weaves among the mysteries a floss-like and wholly meaningless course--if course it be. In short, I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came confused and dismayed" (p. 64) and Anderson: "Are our lives worth living?" (p. 71).

¹¹Luccock, p. 175.

¹²Luccock, p. 209.

¹³Stewart, p. 149. He quotes Carlos Baker on Hemingway "the consciousness of God is in his books, and the Book of Common Prayer is seldom far out of his reach". He makes use of ritual and sacrament "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (134); in "Big Two-Hearted River" illness is healed by nature:" the story becomes, at last, a symbol of sacramental living" (136).

¹⁴See Stewart, pp. 141-2.

¹⁵Stratford, Faith and Fiction, Creative Process in Greene and Mauriac, University of Notre Dame Press, 1964, p. 3.

¹⁶O'Neill, Letter to Jean George Nathan, in O'Neill and his Plays, edited Carghill, Fagin, Fisher, N.Y. University Press, 1961, p. 115.

¹⁷"Credo" in O'Neill and his Plays, p. 115.

¹⁸Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 209.

¹⁹See Stewart, p. 99, note 82.

²⁰Stewart, p. 133. He thus places Cather beside Eliot whose "Ash Wednesday" he claims as the chief Christian poem of our time. The

basis of Death Comes for the Archbishop he asserts to be love which makes miracles. (p. 132).

²¹ Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, pp. 199-200. Previously he has said that in the meeting of the different cultures in Death Comes for the Archbishop Cather "almost denies her own persistent concern with the 'darker instincts': that is with those temptations and acerbations of the flesh which have rested beneath the cultivated surface of her art, and have actually been responsible for the tension of her work" (p. 195).

²² Jessup, The Faith of Our Feminists, N.Y.: Richard R. Smith, 1950, p. 115.

²³ Jessup, p. 116. Daiches notes "the moral pattern of Death Comes for the Archbishop is deficient because the author is warmly sympathetic to everybody. Except for one degenerate murderer. . . . there is hardly a character who is not admirable in his way ; . . . there is a certain failure to project with complete conviction the significance of his [Latour's] missionary impulse. The qualities which Miss Cather admired in New Mexican life were, indeed, the qualities to be found there before her two heroes came on the scene" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 79).

²⁴ O Pioneers! Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1962, p. 297.

²⁵ Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 93.

²⁶ Shadows on the Rock, pp. 162-3.

²⁷ "Neighbour Rosicky" in Obscure Destinies, N.Y.: Knopf, 1960, p. 66-7.

²⁸ Jessup, p. 116.

²⁹ See note 5 above and p. 412.

³⁰ rilling, "Willa Cather" in Schroeter, ed. Willa Cather and Her Critics, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, pp. 152-3.

³¹ Mildred Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 137.

³²Bennett, p. 137.

³³Bennett, p. 137.

³⁴Bennett, p. 134.

³⁵Bennett, p. 137.

³⁶The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 170.

³⁷The Song of the Lark, p. 175.

³⁸The Song of the Lark, p. 175.

³⁹Shadows on the Rock, p. 247.

⁴⁰Catholicism, p. 45.

⁴¹Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 50.

⁴²Shadows on the Rock, p. 137.

⁴³Shadows on the Rock, p. 127.

⁴⁴Shadows on the Rock, p. 224.

⁴⁵Shadows on the Rock, p. 149.

⁴⁶Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 254.

⁴⁷Shadows on the Rock, pp. 154-5.

⁴⁸Shadows on the Rock, pp. 180, 182.

⁴⁹Shadows on the Rock, pp. 177-8.

⁵⁰Sergeant, p. 139.

⁵¹Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 289-90.

⁵²Sergeant, p. 238.

⁵³Gesimar, p. 155.

⁵⁴Trilling in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 149.

⁵⁵The Song of the Lark, p. 160.

⁵⁶The Song of the Lark, p. 160.

⁵⁷One of Ours, N.Y.: Knopf, 1965, p. 49.

⁵⁸One of Ours, p. 50.

⁵⁹My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961,
p. 218.

⁶⁰My Ántonia, p. 215.

⁶¹The Professor's House, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 141-2.

⁶²One of Ours, p. 25.

⁶³One of Ours, pp. 203-4.

⁶⁴Bennett notes that Cather disliked missionaries to China as a result of one Red Cloud girl who married a dentist and returned from China to give paid lectures and display her curios and objets d'art which Cather suspected her of getting through exploitation (136).

⁶⁵One of Ours, p. 211. See fuller discussion, pp. 352-3.

⁶⁶The Song of the Lark, p. 189.

⁶⁷The Song of the Lark, p. 167.

⁶⁸The Song of the Lark, p. 209.

⁶⁹The Song of the Lark, p. 210.

⁷⁰The Song of the Lark, pp. 209-10.

⁷¹One of Ours, p. 24.

⁷²One of Ours, p. 180.

⁷³One of Ours, p. 30.

⁷⁴O Pioneers!, p. 252.

⁷⁵O Pioneers!, p. 251.

⁷⁶The Professor's House, p. 280.

⁷⁷The Professor's House, p. 79.

⁷⁸Sergeant, pp. 193-4.

⁷⁹My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 94.

⁸⁰My Ántonia, p. 18.

⁸¹Zabel, "Willa Cather; The Tone of the Time" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 222.

⁸²My Mortal Enemy, p. 17.

⁸³The Song of the Lark, p. 95.

⁸⁴"On Shadows on the Rock" in On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 16.

⁸⁵Shadows on the Rock, p. 97.

⁸⁶Morley Callaghan, Such is My Beloved, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1957, p. 37.

⁸⁷E.J. Pratt in "Brébeuf and his Brethren", Collected Poems, 2nd ed., Toronto: Macmillan, 1958, p. 296.

⁸⁸Henry Adams too turned back to mediaeval Catholicism and like Cather found in the Virgin a "beneficent intermediary between the human and the divine. The worship of the Virgin built the great cathedrals; it culminated aesthetically in the Rose Window at Chartres ". He opposes the Virgin as a symbol of infinite energy to the modern dynamo (See Stewart, p. 26).

⁸⁹Connolly Francis, "Willa Cather" in Fifty Years of the American Novel, pp. 69-87.

⁹⁰Jessup, p. 116.

⁹¹Geismar, p. 199. Geismar continues that this fusion has "brought together the psychological extremes in Cather's work at the cost, perhaps, of only one element in her art--her own underlying sense of life and reality, of passion and suffering. . . . [She achieves] sentimental harmony at the cost of all real emotional vitality", and again, "This is a woman's way of salvation" (p. 198-9).

⁹²Sergeant, p. 238.

⁹³Sullivan, "Symbolism in Catholic Worship" in Johnson, p. 44.

⁹⁴Johnson, p. 39.

⁹⁵Johnson, pp. 50-1.

⁹⁶Tillich, quoted in Johnston, pp. 108-9. Heschel defines the real symbol as "a visible object that represents something invisible, something present representing something absent", while conventional symbols suggest by reason of association, relationship or convention, like the flag (Johnson, p. 54). Tillich too discusses this difference; the religious symbol is not a sign like the red light but "actually participates in the power of that which it symbolizes. . . . It grows organically. The symbol opens up a level of meaning which otherwise is closed. . . . makes accessible to our mind levels of experience from which we otherwise would be shut off. . . . [They are] results of a creative^{en} counter with reality [and] die if this encounter ceases". Religious symbols are used "to point beyond themselves to that which has unconditional, unlimited and infinite meaning"; they are not ultimate in themselves but holy because they participate in the holiness of that to which they point (Johnson, pp. 108-9).

⁹⁷Johnston, p. 114.

⁹⁸Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 149.

⁹⁹Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 154-5.

¹⁰⁰See discussion, p. 503.

¹⁰¹Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 125.

¹⁰²The Professor's House, p. 69. See also "Escapism": "Religion and art spring from the same root and are close kin. Economics and art are strangers" (On Writing, p. 27). This is also the theory of Clive Bell in his article "Art and Religion": "Religion, as I understand it, is an expression of the individual's sense of the emotional significance of the universe. I should not be surprised to find that art was an expression of the same thing. Anyway, both seem to express emotions different from and transcending the emotions of life. Certainly both have the power of transporting men to superhuman ecstasies; both are means to unearthly states of mind. Art and religion belong to the same world . . . as twin manifestations of the spirit (62-3). (Clive Bell, Art, N.Y.: Capricorn Books, 1958, pp. 62-3).

¹⁰³In her comparison of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather, Jessup observes that in A Valley of Decision by Edith Wharton the Roman Catholic Church represents "an ordered beneficence, a simplicity of external life, and a richness and suavity of inner relations united in a harmony of thought and act" (p. 98). Ellen Glasgow had been a High Church Anglican and found in the church a real sanctuary with a rich culture of music and tradition but turned to Presbyterianism as the Anglican Church was charitable to all but thought (111). Of the three she observes that Cather was the least religious for her concern was chiefly aesthetic (113).

¹⁰⁴Hall, The Religious Background of American Culture, N.Y.: Ungar, 1959, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵Hall, p. 112.

¹⁰⁶Willa Cather in Europe, N.Y.: Knopf, 1956, pp. 61-2.

¹⁰⁷O Pioneers!, p. 251.

¹⁰⁸My Antonia, p. 174.

¹⁰⁹One of Ours, pp. 242-3.

¹¹⁰The Professor's House, pp. 68-9.

¹¹¹My Mortal Enemy, pp. 18-9.

¹¹²My Mortal Enemy, pp. 92, 94.

¹¹³My Mortal Enemy, p. 73.

- 114 "On Death Comes for the Archbishop" in On Writing, pp. 5-6.
- 115 MacGregor, Aesthetic Experience in Religion, London: Macmillan, 1947, p. 213.
- 116 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 245.
- 117 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 244.
- 118 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 149-50.
- 119 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 11-13.
- 120 Shadows on the Rock, pp. 65-6.
- 121 Shadows on the Rock, p. 66.
- 122 Shadows on the Rock, p. 113.
- 123 George N. Kates, "Willa Cather's Unfinished Avignon Story" in Cather, Five Stories, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1959.
- 124 Quoted Kates, pp. 177-8.
- 125 Kates, p. 210.
- 126 Kates, p. 207.
- 127 Kates, pp. 208-9.
- 128 Kates, p. 208.
- 129 Kates, p. 211.
- 130 The Kingdom of Art, ed. B. Slote, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966, p. 178.
- 131 The Professor's House, p. 100.
- 132 Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 49.

- 133 Zabel in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 222.
- 134 Trilling in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 152.
- 135 Catholicism, p. 186.
- 136 Catholicism, p. 192-3.
- 137 Catholicism, pp. 196-7.
- 138 Kazin, "Elegy and Satire" in On Native Grounds, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956, p. 185.
- 139 O Pioneers!, p. 48. See the characteristics of the pioneer discussed on pp. 59-62.
- 140 My Mortal Enemy, p. 93.
- 141 My Mortal Enemy, p. 65.
- 142 Shadows on the Rock, p. 74.
- 143 Shadows on the Rock, p. 173.
- 144 Parkman, Jesuit Relations, quoted in Brown, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 272.
- 145 Brown, p. 273.
- 146 Kates, p. 203.
- 147 Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 19-20.
- 148 O Pioneers!, p. 36.
- 149 O Pioneers!, pp. 38, 32.
- 150 O Pioneers!, p. 87.
- 151 O Pioneers!, p. 278.
- 152 O Pioneers!, p. 87.

- ¹⁵³ O Pioneers!, pp. 92-3.
- ¹⁵⁴ O Pioneers!, p. 271, 277.
- ¹⁵⁵ Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 227.
- ¹⁵⁶ Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 226.
- ¹⁵⁷ Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 206-7.
- ¹⁵⁸ Sergeant, pp. 233-4.
- ¹⁵⁹ Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 41.
- ¹⁶⁰ Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 6.
- ¹⁶¹ Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁶² Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 278.
- ¹⁶³ Shadows on the Rock, pp. 101-2.
- ¹⁶⁴ Shadows on the Rock, p. 149.
- ¹⁶⁵ Shadows on the Rock, p. 150. See E.J. Pratt's Chabanel, pp. 252-3.
- ¹⁶⁶ Pratt, Brébeuf and His Brethren, p. 246.
- ¹⁶⁷ Pratt, p. 258.
- ¹⁶⁸ Shadows on the Rock, p. 149.
- ¹⁶⁹ Shadows on the Rock, pp. 154-5.
- ¹⁷⁰ Shadows on the Rock, p. 183.
- ¹⁷¹ A Lost Lady, N.Y.: Knopf, 1963, p. 168.
- ¹⁷² In Europe, p. 21.

- ¹⁷³ O Pioneers!, p. 252.
- ¹⁷⁴ O Pioneers!, pp. 201-2.
- ¹⁷⁵ My Mortal Enemy, p. 94.
- ¹⁷⁶ Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 210.
- ¹⁷⁷ Shadows on the Rock, p. 136.
- ¹⁷⁸ Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 97-8.
- ¹⁷⁹ Shadows on the Rock, pp. 62, 49.
- ¹⁸⁰ Shadows on the Rock, p. 65.

CHAPTER 12: MY MORTAL ENEMY

¹ Marcus Klein, Introduction, My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, pp. xvi-xvii. The similarity of St. Peter and Myra Henshawe is pointed out by several other critics. Geismar calls it a postscript to The Professor's House (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 188); Sergeant comments that both "symbolize heroic failure against odds. They are opposites, since one died, perversely, of riches and the other, aggrievedly, of poverty". Both marry for love and both in middle life, evade "by a sort of right to personal solitude, the usual human sense of responsibility to lifetime relationships. . . . Both St. Peter and Myra Henshawe are resentful and unprecise in apprehending the working of fate in their lives" (Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, pp. 219-220). See also Randall's comment, note 3, below, and Giannone's that Cather in this novel tests the case of a St. Peter "without joy", resulting in "a chilly objectivity which creates a jarring novel" (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, p. 170).

² Klein, p. xxii.

³ All page references in the text are from My Mortal Enemy; see note 1, above. The novel has received little critical attention and little unqualified praise. Randall calls it "in many ways the most bizarre of Willa Cather's books", both the most fascinating and the least likeable (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 239). The protagonist turns against the

values of adult life; but the book indicates Cather's new distrust of passions and a choice of ritual rather than a development of the self. The novel, he concludes, is really a glorification of money which is the only way of effecting one's will in this world (235-7). Daiches suggests that it depicts the theme of Flaubert or Maupassant but that it lacks ironic realism and the ability to probe sordidness below the frustrated romanticism. It does not have the control and the clear surface of A Lost Lady, and Myra's degeneration lacks conviction because the incidents are contrived and not fully detailed, and the background is melodramatic (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 72-3). Geismar observes that it is a novella with simplicity of form and perfection of finish whose real achievement lies in Cather's account of the destruction of human relations, yet he asks if it is not really John Drisoll's money which makes the world such an impressive place and which Myra desires instead of poverty and humility (190).

⁴Brown observes that the style is fluid and transparent, that the novelette is Cather's boldest experiment (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953): "It is the boldest experiment she had made in leaving out, in the subordination of secondary characters, the abbreviation of incidents, the reduction of settings to where 'they seemed to exist, not so much in the author's mind, as in the emotional penumbra of the characters themselves'. Nothing distracts from the rendering of Myra, least of all the style, fluid and transparent beyond anything Willa Cather had accomplished" (Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 250). Adams suggests that the narrator is not obtrusive, the novel consistent and unbroken and created with unparalleled skill; it is rich in suggestive details, a large number of allusions and in symbols which "echo from point to point" (unpublished thesis, "Six Novels of Willa Cather", Ohio State University, 1961, p. 148).

⁵See Van Ghent's comment on A Lost Lady: do we see the "fatality of Marian Forrester's nature and corrosion overtaking it" or only "the corruption of an image in Neil's mind" (Willa Cather, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p. 28). Giannone suggests that the narrator is a "pawn" "to preserve the heroine's mystery and impenetrability". "Birdseye" suggests "undiscriminating flatness of vision rather than comprehensiveness . . . [Cather achieves] a gain in suspense and numerous ironies, but her perspective also prevents the reader from knowing Myra very well. We are twice removed from the central character, first by the limited view, second by the myopic focus of the vision, the result of Nellie's immaturity. . . . Myra's mind continues to elude her understanding, and ours" (pp. 170, 172).

⁶See Klein's comments, note 9 below.

⁷She comments that it is "a curious little book, artistically very attractive, a novel *démeublé* like *A Lost Lady*; that it concerns a malicious--though magnetic--character does not altogether account for the slight feeling of puzzling dissatisfaction with which one turns from it" (p. 33).

⁸Kronenberger, "Willa Cather", *Bookman* (U.S.) LXXIV, 1931, p. 136. He suggests that "the complexity becomes mere mystery, the woman mere disjointedness". See also Giannone's comment that there is no analysis and only the skimpiest details (170), and Rapin's similar comment that there are too few incidents, too separate in time to create an idea of character or life (*Willa Cather*, N.Y.: Robert M. McBride, 1930, p. 79).

⁹See Klein: "The narrator wanders in and out of perspective and acts sometimes as a naive observer and sometimes as the author's spokesman. An eighteen-year-old lady journalist who looks very much like Willa Cather herself at eighteen wanders twice into the story without apparent function" (p. xxii). He continues: "It is not so surely composed a novel as *A Lost Lady*. But in no other novel did Willa Cather ever so strenuously grasp and compress her matter" for in it "she achieved a relentless purity of style. . . . It is a book made with the utmost rigour, and it is therefore the perfect expression of Myra Henshawe" (p. xxi).

¹⁰Van Ghent discusses this at some length. "Aside from the essential interest of the character, the significance of the book lies in its structural movement toward the metamorphosis occurring in middle age, the invasion of ancestry into personality. . . . Myra dies overwhelmed by the ancestors--that strange Irish agglomeration of the dark primitive with what is most magical in Christianity and with what is most censorious, turning to the revenge of those magic snakes which St. Patrick drove out of Ireland to lodge in the souls of his converts. The themes of the ancestors and the instinctive self come together here in one person, in a barbaric pattern of destructiveness. But the book leaves one with that unsatisfied feeling of something unseated and unREFERRED, something belonging to a larger context than Myra Henshawe's Irishness, something whose resolution is here perhaps facile, a kind of ethnic cliché" (pp. 34-5).

¹¹Apparently certain critics in common with Geismar assumed that this "mortal enemy" was Myra's own self (see Geismar, p. 190). George Seibel objected to a literary lady who held this view and wrote to Cather asking if the husband was not her enemy. Cather replied: "I wanted your address this fall to send you a copy of *My Mortal Enemy*, which I had a premonition you would understand--and that most people wouldn't . . . Of course, you are quite right. Please tell Mrs. B---, with my compliments, that I can't see much in this

particular story unless one gets the point of it. There is nothing much to it but the point" ('Miss Willa Cather from Nebraska', New Colophon II Sept. 1949, pp. 207-8).

¹²Sergeant, p. 193.

¹³My Mortal Enemy, p. xvi. He continues that Myra's husband is her enemy "because he is the source for her of human relationship, of that which passes without fulfillment, of mortality" (p. xxi). Elsewhere he explains: "what in their marriage was destructive . . . is what is destructive in 'messy existence' itself. Myra turns, in this savage, bitter age of hers, to what is not messy . . . to a particular bare headland in the Pacific" (p. xx). Brown suggests that, while she feels her husband to be her enemy, the reason behind this is "the revival in her of a self that, like St. Peter's early self, found no expression in the values of her prime . . . a rough self. . . . But within the roughness was an intense religious feeling" (pp. 249-50).

¹⁴Van Ghent claims that Myra is drawn with Tolstoian deftness to suggest warmth, intensity, mobility and a hint of malevolence, perhaps from her Irish inheritance (33). Adams comments of her: "She has a great capacity for love and friendship: she shows imaginative sympathy for the sufferings of others; she is deeply preoccupied with sin and injustice; to her formal religious concern even her love of money is subsidiary" (p. 160). But this is not really a true picture of Myra. Klein is perhaps more accurate: "Myra isn't a romantic heroine, but imperious and equipped with a taste for greatness. . . . There is about Myra . . . something not merely unpleasant but disproportionate; the intensity of her character is superior to her materials, and so her grand loving has become compulsive" (pp. xviii-xix). And Randall comments similarly: "Not since The Song of the Lark have we been asked to admire so thoroughly unpleasant a heroine" (p. 239). Giannone adds that she is mean to people but not in her vision of man: "she demands a style of life high enough to suit life's great worth", a manifestation of man's lasting spirit which Oswald lacks (pp. 175-6). Brown indicates that Myra is a real person whom Cather knew well through connections in Lincoln; she died before the First World War but Cather needed something further in order to transmute her into art, a religious sense which she did not develop until The Professor's House (248). The fullest explanation of Myra's personality is offered by Giannone; he suggests that it is music which "affords Nellie her most penetrating insight into Myra's personality". Myra is akin to Norma, the heroine of the opera in which Madame Modjeska is singing, "both in temperament and in the division of loyalties with which she must live". The works themselves are alike in theme, for "both treat a heroine's reconciliation of the opposing obligations of sacred and profane love" (pp. 179-80) and although the dénouement is unlike, "the conception of a strong-willed heroine coming to grasp with contending forces within herself and a

hostile world outside" (p. 181) is common; this musical reference thus allows Nellie to recall Myra's complex personality (pp. 182-3). If this was indeed Cather's intent, it was sufficiently obscure to have been missed by the majority of her critics.

¹⁵Brown suggests that Cather conveys in her picture of the New York of the 1900's "a sensuous richness and metropolitan glamour" it had held for Willa Cather in the years when she came from Pittsburgh "for brief visits packed with going to the opera and the theatre and dining out" (pp. 247-8). Giannone notes that many of these references are musical, for music implies the sophistication and excitement which Nellie seeks in life and remembers of this period of her life (p. 173).

¹⁶Giannone observes that for Nellie, John Driscoll is remembered through musical associations which suggest "wealth, sanctity, death and Catholicism"; yet he contrasts Driscoll, who is able to buy music for cleansing, and Myra: "For him immortality is vulgarly purchased and theatrically displayed. He bribes and demands, and he dramatizes . . . Myra sees into a deeper reality. Experience has shown her the destructability and impermanence of material things. Where he divests death with the trappings of life, she divests death of life's props. . . . In the mind she achieves immortality" (pp. 178-9).

¹⁷Giannone observes "This orthodox Catholicism is a construct of her abnormal will and, like money, is made to obey her private demands on the world. All her life Myra has sought something rare and enduring; not having found it, she makes the act of searching an absolute. This consummates her longing. . . . As Nellie interprets it . . . desire gives the woman what life, love, friends, did not . . . and Myra sees life's essential hardness and its eternal dimension", like Lear a vision of "a world beyond" (p. 176). This seems to be Cather's intention, but her success in conveying this is dubious. Lear returns to love, while Myra dies in hatred of her past, including her "mortal enemy", surely a curious vision of a "world beyond".

¹⁸Bennett informs us that Cather took this idea from an old Indian chief who had requested the governor "to bury him high up on the bluff, sitting upright in his chair, with his face to the East so he could see the sun rise and watch the steamboats go up and down the river." (Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1961, p. 226).

¹⁹My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961, p. 181.

CHAPTER 13: DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP

¹My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 94.

²On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 7.

³On Writing, pp. 5-6.

⁴Death Comes for the Archbishop received immediate acclaim from critic and non-critic, Catholic and non-Catholic, soon after its publication. Sinclair Lewis said "he would gladly give nine Nobel prizes to have written Death Comes for the Archbishop" (quoted in Lewis, Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 122), and Mabel, Smith and Pearce called it "the finest novel that has come out from the South West--and one of the finest novels of America" (Southwest Heritage, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1938, p. 109). D.H. Stewart eulogizes it as "one of the most elaborately contrived novels ever fashioned by an American, rivalling in artistic allusiveness Eliot's Wasteland, in technical complexity Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom and with Faulkner's technical audacity ("Cather's Mortal Comedy", Queen's Quarterly, Summer 1966, p. 244). Perhaps Elizabeth Sergeant's comment will suggest the critical reaction to the novel: "[It] is almost a miracle. . . . The true spirit of the author spoke with resonance, with clarity, with finality. Though now I have re-read the novel many times, the experience is ever full of wonder. . . . The process and the creature are one, as mood and substance are one and whole in the novel. . . . This work, though written in the quiet style of legend, has rhythmic motion, sensuous joy and an uplifted creative tone--the tone of well-being, bien-être, spiritual and physical, that always possessed the author in New Mexico (Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, pp. 227-8). She continues that the author presents the "primary ecstasies" of life; the light dry wind, "the refined and ancient art of cookery", rest and recuperation and a feeling of togetherness (228-9). And Krutch in his review in The Nation, October 12, 1927, suggests that "it is a book to read slowly, to be savoured from paragraph to paragraph, and it is quite the most perfect thing which its author has done since A Lost Lady" (in Willa Cather and Her Critics, Schroeter, ed., Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 61).

See also Brown: "Death Comes for the Archbishop is her great book, the most beautiful achievement of her imagination; in it at last her craftsmanship and her vision are in relation, and that relation is complete. The length of her unconscious preparation to write served her well indeed" ("Willa Cather" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 80), and Bloom: "it is her consistently fostered sympathy in union with discriminated historical details which has made The Archbishop the greatest of her novels" where she creates "an atmosphere of religious continuity which can be stifled only temporarily but never

destroyed . . . a sense of spiritual timelessness rooted in the unrecorded past and extending toward an unfathomable future" (Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, Arcterus Books, 1964, pp. 236, 232). Yet Geismar observed of it that its "perfection of craft covers loss in art and humanity", that it lacks human vision for it represents a "movement back in terms of time and place, this movement away from the real areas of human feeling" where the Mexicans are sentimentalized and Cather denies her own concern with man's "darker instincts" (The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 196). Knight too comments that Cather has become a stylist and lacks life; her later stories are anemic: "prodigal, sweet, painful, disordered and bemused" (American Literature and Culture, N.Y.: Ray Long and Richard Smith, 1932, p. 424); Daiches refers to it as "an episodic and sentimental novel which exploits a cultured religious heroism in a context of picturesque landscape and romantic historical figures, a novel both sophisticated and elemental, both meditative and full of action, an epic success story with a brightly coloured surface" and lacking in any artistic struggle" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 74). And Hicks is the most damning. Speaking of both Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, he says "Instead of the vigorous recreation of frontier realities we find poetic fantasies. Instead of vigorous narrative we find delicately embroidered little episodes. Instead of heroes and heroines we find paragons of piety. Miss Cather's sins have overtaken her. Her method of building novels out of colourful episodes has led to the creation of a series of elaborate tapestries. Her recourse to the charm of reminiscence has become dependence on sweet sentiment and vague nostalgia". She turned to the past as a refuge "to permit her to order her events according to her ideals" and so "she could do nothing but paint pretty pictures" (in The Great Tradition, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1935, pp. 225-6).

⁵On Writing, p. 16.

⁶All page references in the text are from Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964.

⁷Randall comments that the avoidance of conflict is now explicit rather than shuffled off, as in her earlier novels (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, pp. 255-6). In these earlier works she had recognized that "conflict lay at the root of all experience", for conflict is the essence of life and makes the novel an extension of our own experience (288, 308). But in Death Comes for the Archbishop she substitutes for conflict, charming inset stories, beautiful descriptions of landscape, and the home life of the Bishop and Vaillant (288); she deliberately introduces dramatic conflict, but rarely resolves it, as in the case of Padre Martínez. Thus she does not give great and little happenings equal importance; she gives little happenings great importance (308).

⁸On Writing, pp. 9-10.

⁹Crastre Francois, Puvis de Chavannes, N.Y.: Frederick A. Stokes, 1912, pp. 67, 72.

¹⁰"The pale tones and broad flat masses of fresco charmed him. . . Landscape is dominant in his compositions, a modern landscape of delicately coloured light and shadow. To set his key he would carefully note in the sketch-book the ground tone of the wall, and return after to verify it. On this he built, choosing a few leading values to express his scene. . . . He composed without dark shadows to preserve the flatness of the wall. . . . He reduced his execution to the simplest, a transference to the canvas of the plotted cartoon lines. . . . Later he simplified with self-suspicious rudeness and copied from the design like a child. . . . In this tempestuous passionless art with neither blood nor the colour of blood in it, the Olympian drama revived, but purged and spare, humble and more remote" (McColl, Nineteenth Century Art, Glasgow, 1902, pp. 96-7).

¹¹See Keeler's comment in "Narrative without Accent" (Yale Review, XVII, 1965) on the similarity of style between the novel and the St. Genevieve frescoes; both are highly stylized, pictorial, immobile and forming a tableau. The style is "monumental"; the figures are static and arranged in groups. The effect is flat; there is no distinction between foreground and background and both avoid conflict like a morality play or a legend (122-3). However, see Randall, who claims that she means by comparison to Puvis de Chavannes, the "almost un-earthly calm", the central interest in "polished descriptions of landscape and the minute delineation of human figures in clear bright colours". But these do not grow out of the material; rather they are forcefully superimposed to achieve a detached lucid tone at the expense of the conflict and the most interesting complications where the forces of civilization face the forces of nature as in the conflict with Martínez and Gállegos. While Cather hates conflict, she deliberately introduces it (280-1, 284).

¹²Chase, "Five Literary Portraits", Massachusetts Review III, 1961, 2, p. 512.

¹³Keeler, p. 122. See note 11 above.

¹⁴Lambert, unpublished thesis, "Theme and Craftsmanship in Willa Cather's Novels", University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1964, p. 255.

¹⁵Curtin, unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather", University of Wisconsin, 1959,

p. 213. Bloom notes that the structure is episodic, giving equal stress to each incident rather than rising to a climax (p. 200), and Hicks, too, observes its episodic nature though less in admiration: "The episodes are so chosen as to make the most of the colourfulness of the country, the heroism of the characters, and the contrast between the crudeness of the frontier and the religious and cultural refinement of the archbishop. . . . [Like the] various scenes in a tapestry, [they are] rich in material and artful in design" but there is no real unity except "Miss Cather's sense that here, in the meeting of old and new, is a process of rare beauty" ("The Case Against Willa Cather" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 145).

¹⁶Randall suggests that the order is spurious because the problems are not transcended but ignored (309), and summarizes that it is "the most poorly constructed of Willa Cather's work" despite its brilliant passages (287), lacking internal and external discipline: "[it is] a poorly organized book extolling the virtues of order" (309), so that the final form becomes boring and fails to hold the reader's attention (287). But other critics have suggested a different form of organization. D.H. Stewart finds the nine parts and the Prologue to correspond to the seven virtues and their revelation: Faith, Charity Hope, Courage, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, the Beatific Image; and the vices, Pride, Charity, Sloth and Prodigality, Avarice, Envy and Vainglory. Book IV is a void and Latour enters and leaves the Inferno in the cavern; VII has no sin while VIII resolves in blessedness. The Virgin presides over the book like Beatrice; the spiritual climax occurs in Book VII in the May episode and the dramatic climax in Book V in heresy (249). Giannone suggests a more simple scheme according to "the organic pattern of generation". Books I-III deal with the planting and tillage of the Episcopal power among the Mexicans, Indians and the representatives of the earlier Spanish church. Books IV to VII reveal a reverse operation "native influences on Father Latour" and "the interplay between provincial American custom and the Frenchman's Continental manner [which] generates the spiritual growth of New Mexico", and VII-IX deal with the harvest of Latour's garden (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 187-8).

¹⁷Quoted in Footman, "The Genius of Willa Cather", American Literature, X, 1938-9, pp. 138-9.

¹⁸Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 95, 92. Brown notes that "the movement is" wonderfully quick and light, beautiful and appropriate to the atmosphere. In the structure what might easily have become solid masses, comparable with long reaches in the earlier novels, is broken up by brief tales inset with an apparent casualness which recalls the ingenuous narrative manner of Cervantes or Smollett. Everything in Death Comes for the Archbishop is from the past, but it is not all from the same past, and in this lies much of the formal

beauty and almost as much of the great emotional effect of the novel [Cather's] manner in Death Comes for the Archbishop . . . is the manner appropriate to the older and better kind of hagiography, simple, concrete, unemphatic, concentrated" ("Willa Cather" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 82).

¹⁹My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961, p. 372.

²⁰Randall objects that the last section should build to a climax of death since the title leads to that, but instead it is a hedgepodge (284). The wanderings of the Bishop; the blurring between narrator and character, the introduction of anecdotes and memories from the long-gone past provides distraction; Cather uses stock techniques for building up suspense and then avoids the climax; her style here is bathos of the "his-fingers-plucked-the coverlet" school (285-6). Sergeant observes "The happy death of the thoughtful, mild old priest differs strangely from the tortured struggle, and almost will-to-death of Professor St. Peter" (Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1963, pp. 235-6). Perhaps this in itself indicates something of Cather's intention in the novel to evade the struggle which she saw in life itself for the easier solution of an idealistic death. Although Curtin observes that this passage suggests that the Ego is eternal, that "the human experience gives him a foretaste of man's immortality" (213), there is actually no promise of immortality in the novel except for the dying vision of Lucero (see pp. 532-3 for discussion). Leon Edel indicates the deceptiveness of the title: "The word Death is the first word in that title, even though the novel is once again a novel of conquest, conquest alike of new land and of the souls of men. Indeed, for all the insistence of the title, the book is in reality not about death; it is about Archbishop Latour's courage and steadfastness, his gentleness and wordly wisdom. His death at the end is simply the death that comes to all men--but in giving it significance, Miss Cather may have betrayed her deepest awareness that she herself was engaged in an act of exhuming the dead past" ("The Paradox of Success" in Schroeter, Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 267). Footman claims that the use of "for" and not "to" in the title suggests the acceptance of death and immortality, that Cather queries this immortality but cannot reject it without rejecting the values expressed in the lives of the priests (128). Stewart points out that Cather has a connection with Holbein as well as de Chavannes, that she combines dynamism with meditative calm and "the ubiquity and vigour of death are often enhanced by tempestuous nature but always finally composed within the contemplative mood of the pastoral setting" (p. 248). In Holbein's *Danse* there are only two plates which have no macabre irony, #12 "Death Comes for the Archbishop" and #22 of the priest. He points out that in Death Comes for the Archbishop, there are ninety-six specific deaths as well as hundreds of Navajos and the dead of the Colorado mines: fifty Navajos are massacred by Don José Chavez, twelve Americans are murdered by the

Taos Indians and seven of these are hanged. The twenty-seven individualized deaths vary "humour, irony, horror and acquisition" (247). As Takano observes, there is more real horror in the novel than in The Professor's House or O Pioneers! but the horror is not 'worked up'; the striving for perfection is tragic but the tragedy is not destructive or unbearable because it belongs to the past ('Willa Cather' in Tsuda Review, v, 1960, p. 18).

²¹Kronenberger claims that the "lost light of Death Comes for the Archbishop" is "not religious nor spiritual but idyllic" and that the two priests are "pictorially rather than organically alive" ('Willa Cather' in Bookman (U.S.), LXXIV, 1931, p. 138). Krutch comments "even when her stories are documented rather than recalled she manages to invest documents with the remoteness of recollected experience and to make past things vivid, less because they are present than because some softened memory of them seems to be". She chooses "moments of calm recollection" rather than action in her characters' lives, and her contrasts are deep but not violent: "she sees everything as one sees it when one broods or dreams over the past. . . . What we get is the sense of something far off and beautiful--the picturesqueness and the fragrance of the past more than the past itself, pictures softened by time, and appearing suddenly from nowhere" (The Nation, October 12, 1967, in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 60). And Hicks asks: "Is this really the past out of which the present sprang? Did these men and women ever live? Is there anything in their lives to enable us to better understand our own? . . . We realize that we are confronted by the romantic spirit. Miss Cather, we see, has simply projected her own desires into the past: her longing for heroism, her admiration for natural beauty, her desire--intensified by pre-occupation with doubt and despair--for the security of an unquestioned faith" (Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 145). Cather's personal happiness while writing the book is evidence that it involved no great struggle to bring it to birth; it brought contentment because it was no longer a personal experience but a wish fulfillment.

²²Sergeant, p. 238.

²³Crastre, p. 67.

²⁴Lambert, p. 257; see note 14 above.

²⁵Footman comments that the desert is a third character, interpreted by Vaillant and Latour; and that all the characters in the novel must interpret the desert or succumb to it (140-1).

²⁶Randall suggests that in this novel the enjoyment of nature has become tourism, for there is no longer a struggle with the land, or sowing, harvesting and seasonal activities, but simply cooking and eating three times a day (309-10). Here Cather is reverting to local

colour fiction with its romanticized characters, its realistic setting exploited for its exotic qualities, its absence of real plotting and episodic construction, even its escapist tone and evasion of real problems (291). She is employing "tonal climaxes with light instead of emotional climaxes of action" (290). Keeler indicates that this technique is similar to de Chavannes': "The manner in which the light and the space are used, the manner of stasis instead of accent, of distant vision instead of perspective, of diffusion of light instead of dramatic action, is paralleled to what is 'monumental' in Puvis' frescoes" (126). And Schmittlein observes the "almost pantheistic absorption of man's will, his life and his destiny into the macrocosm of nature" (unpublished thesis, 'Willa Cather's Novels: An Evolving Art', University of Pittsburgh, 1962, p. 165).

²⁷Curtin notes the contrast of the Prologue where "the lush civilized scene reflects the harmony of man and God . . . the picture of dynamic order", and the new world where "faith is not yet ordered and man's faith is not in order but in miracles" (196).

²⁸Randall claims that Vaillant and Latour are not ideal pioneers for the land was broken two centuries before; that while Vaillant is a real pioneer, his life is subjugated and it is the orderly life of Latour which is stressed rather than the pioneering spirit (260). This pioneer spirit is now truncated; Vaillant has the spiritual and physical energy but not the aesthetic or scholarly taste and is subservient to the man of thought in Cather's return to hierarchy (279). Cather has separated her categories of head and heart into two separate individuals who respond separately to beauty and to work; she suggests they are no longer compatible (276).

²⁹On Writing, p. 12.

³⁰Sergeant, p. 233. She also altered details which Sergeant claims are minor and fitting for a fictional account but which are, nevertheless, significant. When the priests enter Santa Fé, they are not alone in The Life but are met by a thousand people; and Latour returns to Old Mexico with an envoy, not alone. It is clear here that Cather is exaggerating the movement from nothing to everything to reflect more credit on Latour and to suggest that the difficulties he succeeds in overcoming alone are almost insurmountable. As well, she reverses the order of death, and brings Vaillant back to Santa Fé for several visits, where in reality the two were together for eight years and separated for twenty more (Sergeant, pp. 233-4). As Sergeant points out, she changed the emphasis of the account for to emphasize Vaillant would have been to "weaken the spell" of Latour (233-4).

³¹See O Pioneers!, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1962, pp. 37-8.

³²Daiches commented that this episode has "the tone and colouring of a Christmas card" (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, p. 80).

³³Randall comments that the Bishop offers Sada his fur cloak knowing that she cannot accept (295-6). He thus achieves the effects of sacrifice without any discomfort to himself, for Cather believes that he should have the best of all worlds (300-01).

³⁴See Boom, pp. 223-4.

³⁵Keeler, pp. 122-3.

³⁶Shakespeare, Sonnet #18, lines 13, 14.

³⁷On Writing, p. 7. Randall suggests that the Archbishop represents order, reason and humanity, that he is both a social aristocrat and a natural aristocrat. Cather has finally admitted that blood counts (263). Sister Toler notes the artistic qualities of Latour but does not suggest that this is inappropriate to his role as a priest. 'His fine mind and complete priestly dedication merge smoothly with his sensitivity to order and beauty and his sense of the historical continuum. . . . The Bishop realizes that for man's greatest good art, religion and culture must support each other in the creation of a civilization which is essentially a recreation or synthesizing of the best of the past and the present (unpublished thesis, 'Man as Creator of Art and Civilization in the Works of Willa Cather', University of Notre Dame, 1965, p. 202). The real problem with this argument is that we see little religion and little priestly dedication in the character of Latour as Cather presents him.

³⁸Auclair also possesses silver candlesticks and a walnut secretary and John Bergson too owns a walnut secretary and writes in a flowing hand similar to that of Latour. These are marks of Cather's chosen.

³⁹Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁰Randall points out that Latour is not at ease in all societies but only in those where relationships are based on formality and politeness; his sense of loss is fitting for a worldly person but not for one dedicated to God (300-01).

⁴¹See On Writing, pp. 12-13: "I am amused that so many of the reviews of this book begin with the statement: 'This book is hard to classify'. Then why bother? Many more assert vehemently that it is

not a novel. Myself, I prefer to call it a narrative. In this case I think the term more appropriate. But a novel, it seems to me, is merely a work of the imagination in which a writer tries to present the experiences of a group of people by the light of his own".

⁴²Schmittlein notes that there is no "even occasional 'everyday' view of their duties, or of their qualities as men" (unpublished thesis, "Willa Cather's Novels, An Evolving Art", University of Pittsburgh, 1962, p. 166).

⁴³Sergeant, pp. 233-4.

⁴⁴Randall, pp. 280, 269. He notes also that Latour cannot exist alone but requires Vaillant, while previously, although Cather has made use of double protagonists such as Jim and Antonia or the Professor and Tom Outland, they are psychically whole and can live alone (278-9).

⁴⁵Austin in Earth Horizons, quoted in Sergeant, p. 235.

⁴⁶Giannone observes "With the enormous bell the American frontier seems formally within the jurisdiction of historical record. The bell tolls the beginning of a new cultural order in New Mexico" (97-8).

⁴⁷On Writing, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁸On Writing, p. 6 and Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 28.

⁴⁹See discussion of this, p. 449.

⁵⁰Giannone comments on this craft: "Art brings to human scale the ideal beyond human reach. . . . [Cather sees this] art in homage to the Virgin as a bridge to a transcendent order Through art and religion man gives bounty to God." (198) But Randall suggests that this cult of the Virgin reduces the stature of the peasants to that of a child with a doll (302).

⁵¹Cather's sympathy here is evident, for she herself concealed the date of her birth, claiming it as 1876 rather than 1873 (see Brown, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, p. 17, footnote by Leon Edel). Here, when Vaillant says he would rather "combat the superstitions of a whole Indian pueblo than the vanity of one white woman", Latour replies "I would rather do almost anything than go through such a scene again. . . . I don't think I ever assisted at anything so cruel" (192-3).

⁵²According to Bennett, the Olivares were inspired by the Garbers who appear in *A Lost Lady* as the Forresters (*The World of Willa Cather*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, Bison Books, 1961, p. 240, note for p. 75, line 11).

⁵³Randall points out that Cather's chief interest is not religion but civilized living; she stresses the discomforts of Colorado and the many gifts of the women to the priests. The emphasis of the novel is not on suffering and renunciation but on a personal tribute to individuals, and material goods diminish the sacrifice of Latour (298).

⁵⁴Randall observes of the food references "The triviality of this literary treatment of food for its own sake shows how Willa Cather had degraded Pater's doctrine of beautiful sensations in her old age"; here even physical appetite is linked with the traditions of the past (269). But West claims that this is important, that the incident of the roast lamb, for example, is "a beautiful symbol of the effective synthesis of the senses which inspires the Roman Catholic church to its highest activities. That Church has never doubted that sense is a synthesis of the senses; and it has never doubted that man must take the universe sensibly". But she does qualify this: "It is inconceivable that man was born of woman to suffer more forms of agony . . . simply in order that he should make good soup. That complaint might be made against Miss Cather herself, for her own absorption in sense and the senses. . . Ought not art that tries to make humanity superhuman be esteemed above art that leaves humanity exactly as it is?" ("The Classic Artist" in *Willa Cather and Her Critics*, pp. 64-5, 67).

⁵⁵Quoted by Chase, p. 512.

⁵⁶Randall, p. 269.

⁵⁷Randall, p. 280.

⁵⁸See discussion in *On Writing*, p. 9, and p. 485.

⁵⁹Greene comments that unlike Eliot and Graham Greene, Cather is "not involved with the tactical defence of any specific area of belief, more than with the realistic exploration of religious mores". She is concerned with "those perverse attributes of courage and generosity independent of time which express themselves in a variety of contexts. Miss Cather resolutely avoids larger issues of church discipline, the formalities of doctrine and modes of action within the hierarchy" ("On Death Comes for the Archbishop", *New Mexico Quarterly*, XXVII, 1957, p. 79). Curtin says of Latour "his whole life is a ritual of faith that transcends his temperament" (196), which is "one that tolerates differences and accommodates them to his faith". He tries to show that

"the Catholic Church contains the most perfect means for satisfying a universal human impulse. . . . To the Bishop the Church is Catholic because it has the means of satisfying every basic human need" (211). And Bloom suggests that all are really examples of one ideal: "In her historical imperative nothing is superfluous but that which is temporal or material . . . she does not look for surprising oddities of custom and event which distinguish particular eras but for the profundities of faith which unite all men of all time" (201).

⁶⁰Much of this is taken almost directly from Father Howlett's account; see Bloom, pp. 223-5 for a comparison of the episodes in the two works.

⁶¹Giannone claims that "Latour's use of an aesthetic vocabulary to define a theological matter cancels any possible division between art and religion, the pairing of which evidences a unified sensibility. Jean Marie Latour's life and ideas can stand, I think, as Willa Cather's final answer to the problem of status of art because his work verifies what she thought to be true from the time she started to write" (198-9). While we may grant the last statement, surely Latour's use of aesthetic vocabulary unifies art and religion by making religion merely an adjunct to art.

⁶²Giannone notes the paradoxes in the character of Vaillant: "physical failty contradicts indefatigable energy; coarse aspect hides delicate feeling; gusto and delight in things like food conceal a personal asceticism" (195).

⁶³Sergeant, pp. 233-4.

⁶⁴Bloom indicates that the portrait of Martínez here combines two priests, Father Martínez and Father Gallegos; it is the latter who is a libertine, drunken and dissipated, while the biographical details belong to the real Martínez (266-7).

⁶⁵In Father Howlett, Lucero is merely introduced as a priest whom Lamy must suspend for "irregularities and schismatical tendencies" (Bloom, p. 223).

⁶⁶In Fray Baltazar, Randall observes, Cather faces the problem of evil, in the tyranny and corruption of authority, and the fate of the aesthete who places beauty above goodness and mankind. His gluttony indicates the narcissistic nature of aestheticism (274).

⁶⁷Randall claims that Cather admires the Catholic Church for its ritual and its tradition, but that she also likes the Indian tradition and describes domestic rather than religious ritual. She also treats

the Church as an object of art, in line with her attribution of beauty to Catholicism in the earlier novels, and as an Extension of the Bishop in place of a family line, providing an authoritarian family immune to disintegration where all the members had their own role (303-6). But Cather's treatment of religion is broader than this, and although it has its defects, it has also certain admirable qualities. As Stewart indicates, the novel lacks reality, like Dante; Cather "minimizes the Church's dubious role in running native Indian cultures and exaggerates, as was her wont, the faults of the Anglo-Saxons", while at times "art supplants religion in providing the soul with cushions to shelter it briefly against extinction. . . . Nevertheless the novel remains like the Divine Comedy ethically and aesthetically challenging." (p. 257)

⁶⁸On Writing, pp. 5-6; see pp. 510-11.

⁶⁹Rebecca West replies that D. H. Lawrence treated the problem differently. Although he claimed "The consciousness of one branch of humanity is the annihilation of the consciousness of another branch. . . . We can understand the Indian only in terms of the death of our consciousness", he was willing to attempt this while Cather merely dismissed it. She replies that Lawrence would not have been content to evade the mystery of "Stone Lips" (Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 67).

⁷⁰Sergeant, p. 207. She showed no interest in the tribal side of the Indian, though Mabel Luhan, wife of an Indian, was trying to interest her friends in protecting the Pueblo lands and ceremonies from government extinction and to bring them cohesion and democracy. To Cather this whole issue seemed fanatical and unimportant (Sergeant, pp. 207-8).

⁷¹Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958, p. 122.

⁷²D. H. Stewart, "Cather's Mortal Comedy", p. 257.

⁷³See My Ántonia, p. 179, The Song of the Lark, pp. 175-6.

⁷⁴Daiches, p. 79.

⁷⁵Randall, p. 302.

⁷⁶Greene, p. 81.

⁷⁷Greene, pp. 69, 75.

⁷⁸Sergeant, p. 226.

CHAPTER 14: SHADOWS ON THE ROCK

¹Death Comes for the Archbishop, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, pp. 97-8.

²Brown, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. 271-2. "The novel in which Willa Cather travelled farthest from Red Cloud drew most of its emotional power from her memories of life there as they flooded her mind during the years when that life had finally taken its place in the irrecoverable past" (p. 286).

³Geismar, The Last of the Provincials, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1959, p. 197. He observes that the scenes are attractive and skilfully arranged for "a panoramic view of the 'graces and traditions' of the early French colonists in the New World". It "may be viewed as a children's story. In any case, it is as a fairy-tale of the Church and the New World--as a glowing account of Christian heroes, saints, martyrs, and of ecclesiastical legends and miracles" and it indicates the goal of Cather's middle age (197). The reception of Shadows on the Rock was less enthusiastic than Cather's previous novels. Fadiman calls it "sweetness and twilight" ('Willa Cather', Nation, CCCXXXV, 1932, p. 564) and Hatcher "beautiful and completely static" (Creating the Modern American Novel, N.Y.: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935, p. 71). Daiches comments on its "surface brilliance": "It is in a way a highly finished performance, with its careful fitting of character to environment, its deep sense of the needs and achievements, the nostalgia and adjustments, the mingling of old and new loyalties, of the early settlers"; he continues that it is effective in smoothness and finish, the prose is vivid and picturesque, but that it lacks freshness and the vitality of her former work (Willa Cather: A Critical Introduction, N.Y.: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 86-7). Similarly Randall finds it a purer work of art than Death Comes for the Archbishop, with greater unity of tone and more truthful in admitting the unheroic in life in the character of Auclair; he concludes that it is "slight but charming" (The Landscape and the Looking-Glass, Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, p. 341). Brown calls it "perfect in the beauty of structure and style . . . the mood of nostalgia and charm", and notes that while it lacks vitality and drama, "No more graceful book has been achieved in our time" and it is the best novel drawn from Canadian history yet to appear ('Homage to Willa Cather', Yale Review, XXXVI, 1946-7, pp. 88-9). The most critical of these is Kronenberger: "There is no undue sentimentality; the book is simply never real. . . . Not even pretending to treat of real life, it can teach us little about human character, can penetrate to little permanent truth, can stimulate few really deep emotions. It can never be, in other words, much more than charmingly untrue and aesthetically pleasing" ('Willa Cather' in Bookman (U.S.), LXXIV, 1931, p. 139). Yet it received the Prix Fémina Américain in

1933, and Gauthier writes of it "Willa Cather a écrit le seul document important sur le Canada: Cécile Auclair peut prendre place à côté de Maria Chapdelaine" (Le Canada Français et le Romain Américain, Paris: Tobra Editeur, 1948, p. 317).

⁴On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1922, p. 15.

⁵Leon Edel, "The Paradox of Success" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, ed. Schroeter, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 269. See also Brown: "Her ultimate symbol was the stratified, immovable rock, 'the utmost expression of human need'" (page 331; the last part of this book was completed by Edel after Brown's death).

⁶Elizabeth Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 243.

⁷Louise Bogan, "American Classic" in Willa Cather and Her Critics, p. 128.

⁸Chase, "Five Literary Portraits", Massachusetts Review, III, 1961-2, p. 512.

⁹On Writing, p. 16. Bloom notes that she deals with the whole war of Sir William Phips, 1790, in relation to the nun's apron; she excluded a major war in accord with her artistic purpose and subordinated history to a religious symbol ("Shadows on the Rock", Twentieth Century Literature, II, July 1956, p. 76). Randall claims that the salad dressing is "an inadequate symbol of the comely life"; the diocese shrinks to the household and the tending of religious affairs to the family hearth; Cather is involved not in the rediscovery of the past but in hanging on to its routine" (312).

¹⁰All page references in the text are from Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964.

¹¹Sergeant, p. 264. Bloom explains that the method is one of "mainly anacoluthon" in Cather's own phrase (Willa Cather's Gift of Sympathy, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, Arcturus Books, 1964, p. 198); it is episodic like Death Comes for the Archbishop, juxtaposing a series of minor suspenses and beginning episodes in one place to explain them later. The effect is cumulative: "Pieces of action are seemingly fragmented as isolated units, each having an immediate meaning of its own. But there is organicism in that particularized meanings and consequences of the single action extend to and become absorbed in the greater situation" ("Shadows on the Rock", p. 72).

¹²Kronenberger, p. 139.

¹³Sergeant, p. 243.

¹⁴Sergeant, p. 241.

¹⁵Randall comments on the irony here; the New World does not have the crimes of Europe, but because it is static rather than because it is improving; it is merely not getting any worse. He applies this to Cather's opinion of the thirties, ignoring the growth and concentrating only on the decay (329, 331).

¹⁶Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace, 1957, p. 14.

¹⁷Randall notes that the frontier has now become an enemy, deadly to man, rather than exhilarating (314).

¹⁸Kronenberger remarks of Pierre: "the only coureur de bois to appear, far from swearing, swilling and wenching, is merely affectionately in love with Cécile and wistful about his childhood" ("Willa Cather" in Bookman (U.S.), LXXIV, 1931, p. 138). Yet Brown comments "In terms of the Nebraska novels, Pierre is the rarest of all admirable kinds, the pioneer of the second generation who had to the full the finest qualities of the first. . . . Pierre is another Ántonia; the wild land is for him an ideal setting and an opportunity. His marriage . . . [like Ántonia's] assures us that the future, evolving in the ways of a new society will also preserve the graces and traditions of Europe" (285), and Sergeant calls him "the typical Cather wanderer-adventurer" (243).

¹⁹Randall suggests that although there is a qualified return to individualism with Pierre, in reality he is evading society by his dedication to nature, like Leatherstocking; civilization is waning and Cather is looking backward with nostalgia (340); indeed he finds Pierre an "implicit denial of everything the Auclair family stands for" and thus the marriage which joins the individual with the group is unreal (327).

²⁰In Shadows on the Rock, says Geismar, Cather presents a well-ordered sphere of loving-kindliness and cleanliness". In Pierre's surrender to "the prevailing ethos of the respectable affections", Cather succeeds in combining "Europe and America, asceticism and cuisine, tradition and the frontier in 'a woman's way of salvation' which has lost the reality of life" (198-9).

²¹On Writing, p. 16.

²²On Writing, p. 16.

²³Chase, p. 512.

²⁴Trilling, After the Genteel Tradition, N.Y.: Viking Press, 1964, p. 55.

²⁵Brown, p. 284. He suggests that part of the inspiration of the novel is Cather's wish to recall her own relationship with her father after his death. See note 2 above. Van Ghent too emphasizes the father-child relationship as "the essential image of human continuity". The situations are primitive and legendary, as indicated by the "Once upon a time" beginning, and "the living characters of the book move in the simple, agelessly human patterns of figures in a legend (Willa Cather: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964, pp. 38-40). The child, she observes, represents "the initial and potential self"; this symbol is doubled in the introduction of the child Jacques, as a symbol of redemption and sacrament (39, 40).

²⁶Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961, p. 168.

²⁷Yet Quinn calls Cécile "one of Willa Cather's finest creations" (American Fiction, N.Y.: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1936, p. 693). Gauthier suggests she is the equal of Maria Chapdelaine (317); Sergeant claims she has "the finesse, address and compassion of a much older woman, coupled with a disarming innocence", although she has remarked that "one can have more than enough of a child heroine, however sage and efficient" which suggests that she finds Cécile a little wearing as well (242-3). And Geismar finds her "innocent and untouched . . . without passion or the capacity for passion" (198).

²⁸Randall finds the tone of the novel smug and complacent; it reflects the triumph of the city, of comely life and the upper middle class. Although the Île D'Orléans is a Paradise, it is occupied by imbeciles who must be defeated (324).

²⁹Sergeant observes of Auclair: "In this pious enclosed space her hero, once a petit bourgeois of Paris, a philosophic apothecary in the service of Frontenac, fitted in a docile way. He cherished 'the flame of the foyer' to preserve it from the forest and the savages which might extinguish 'the precious image he had borne overseas' "(242). But see Randall's comment on the Archbishop, p. 263.

³⁰Randall observes that for Cather, Laval and Frontenac are "heroic individualists who live on into an age of trivialities" (313),

and Bloom too comments that they are typical of the pioneers who can conquer but not hold and who are replaced by profiteers ("Shadows on the Rock", p. 78). Gauthier suggests that Cather's presentation of Frontenac as a gentleman and an essentially humane man is unusual, for these characteristics are rarely associated with him by the historians (287).

³¹O Pioneers!, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1962, p. 55.

³²Sergeant notes of these scenes "This French interior is painted with the strokes of a Dutch master. The obscure family, with all its detail of living, is clear as if seen behind glass in a museum" (242). See also Randall's comment that the household is a sanctuary like "a room of one's own" (316), and woman becomes the transmitter of culture. He notes that there is no longer a balance between innovation and tradition; society is stratified with the Church at the top, the lower classes at the bottom, and the Auclairs in the middle, bourgeois benevolent to the lower classes but never treating them as equals (318, 320-2).

³³Death Comes for the Archbishop, pp. 97-8.

³⁴Bloom observes that the city illustrates Cather's theory of the correlation between man's physical adjustment to his environment and the spiritual temper which brings him there ("Shadows on the Rock", p. 77).

³⁵Giannone finds the bell "the unique voice of French Canada", although he claims its religious significance is secondary. It heightens the pioneers in their struggle with daily life, it gives them confidence and satisfies their need for "persistence, punctuality and religious devotion", and it represents the tight control of Laval over the colony, indicating to the people of French Canada that "their hardship and isolation are part of the divine plan" (Music in Willa Cather's Fiction, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968, pp. 202-3). It symbolizes "the cycle of life moving in harmony with a high devotion" (201).

³⁶Again Cather does not deal with Easter in the novel but only Christmas; this suggests that her associations with Christmas are other than religious, or at least concerned with creation rather than with suffering, sin and death.

³⁷See Death Comes for the Archbishop, p. 50

³⁸Many of Cather's facts are taken from the diary of an apothecary

to Count Frontenac in this period; apparently Cather was able to prove from this the existence of drugs not previously known to have been in use at the time (see Bennett, pp. 133-4).

³⁹Bloom claims that Father Chabanel is an imperfect pioneer, that he has none of the traits but desire and that Cather is torn between a feeling of waste and a need to sacrifice for one's faith ("Shadows on the Rock", p. 82).

⁴⁰Brown notes that Parkman's interpretation of Laval differs considerably from Cather's; Parkman admitted his energy, his genuine austerity, and the correspondence of his life to his faith, but "he thought himself above human law. In vindicating the rights of the Church, he invaded the rights of others and used means from which a healthy conscience would have shrunk. . . . [A casuist] Laval, in his own opinion was always doing the service of God, while his opponents were always doing that of the devil". Cather adopted the opinions of Abbe Henri Arthur Scott; she felt he was right to insist on splendours for the Church in Quebec, right to defend moral and spiritual values in civil affairs and she allows only his stubborn, quarrelsome and tyrannical nature (Brown, pp. 272-4).

⁴¹In the lives of Hector, Chabanel and Jeanne Le Ber, Randall notes that Cather advocates devotion to one's calling over human ties but now she suggests that this loss is "intolerable if it excludes all human warmth" (335). See Randall's comments, pp. 300-01 and discussion, Chapter 13, note 33 above.

⁴²Gauthier notes that the novel deals not only with the Triumphant Church but also the suffering church (172).

⁴³This incident is taken from a similar incident in *Red Cloud* where Cather's little nephew Charles insisted on giving his cow to "the little Jesus" (Bennett, pp. 38-9).

CONCLUSION

¹Quoted in Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963, p. 264.

²Bennett, The World of Willa Cather, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, p. 199.

³Lewis, Willa Cather Living, N.Y.: Knopf, 1953, pp. xvii, 39.

⁴Takano, "Willa Cather: Her Interpretation of Life and Art," Tsuda Review V, 1960, p. 4.

⁵Stephen, "Ernest Hemingway and the Rhetoric of Escape" in The Twenties: Poetry and Prose, R. E. Langford and W. E. Taylor, eds. Deland: Florida: Everett Edwards Press, 1966, pp. 82-6.

⁶Klein, Introduction to My Mortal Enemy, N.Y.: Random House, Vintage Books, 1961, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁷Klein, p. vi.

⁸Shadows on the Rock, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 149.

⁹Quoted in Curtin, unpublished thesis, "The Relation of Ideas and Structure in the Novels of Willa Cather," University of Wisconsin, 1959, pp. 121-2.

¹⁰"Escapism" in On Writing, N.Y.: Knopf, 1962, p. 20.

¹¹"The Novel D^em^eubl^e" in Not Under Forty, N.Y.: Knopf, 1964, p. 48.

¹²The Song of the Lark, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1963, p. 378.

¹³On Writing, p. 28.

¹⁴Tennant, "The Room Beyond" in On Writing, pp. xi-xiii.

¹⁵On Writing, p. viii.

¹⁶On Writing, pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁷On Writing, p. xiii.

¹⁸The Kingdom of Art, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1966, pp. 424-5.

¹⁹Sergeant, p. 281 and My Ántonia, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1961, p. 18.

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